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The God We Trust

Studies in the Devotional
Use of the Apostles' Creed

George Alexander
By
G. A. JOHNSTON ROSS

*Professor of Homiletics
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Introduction

THE purpose of this book is practical, and not academic. It is an endeavour to meet a need begotten of the conditions of our time—a need which is constantly changing its form, is probably not even very wide-spread, but is very clamorous where it exists at all. It is the need for some order and system in our religious belief.

Incredible as it may seem in an age which is supposed to be in revolt against dogma, quite a number of persons who are entirely lay and inexperienced are hungering for something like a portable “system of theology”: for a full round of religious teaching upon and interpretation of the world and of our place and prospect in it: in fact, for a fairly complete and trustworthy “creed.”

And this is precisely that which the times deny. Owing to a combination of causes which need not be here enumerated (for the story has been very often told), the thinking

and preaching of religious leaders have been forced back in our day upon one or two very central truths and appeals. These truths *are* central and fundamental, and we cannot be too thankful that emphasis is to-day so widely placed upon such world-uniting doctrines as the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. But the fact remains that for a certain class of mind these truths do not constitute a satisfactory religion. They do not cover enough ground. Without explanations and amplifications which would make them unrecognizable, they do not answer some of the deepest questions of the mind and heart. After all, there was something in the old-fashioned idea of a "plan" of salvation which answered to the human heart's need. But the religion of the hour, while it announces excellent propositions, has no "plan": no ordered and systematic interpretation to offer of all the facts we see.

No doubt we must be patient. If we of this generation cannot go beyond one or two central truths in the interpretation of that new world which has been given to us by modern

knowledge—if we of this hour cannot construct catechisms and confessions of faith (and our barrenness and impotence in that direction are as notorious as our inability to build cathedrals) we have good hope that for those who come after us there may be prepared more complete and systematic statements of religious truth.

But meanwhile what are many in our day to do? They vaguely feel that, with the concentration of emphasis upon just one or two propositions which minister specially to the enforcement of social duty, the true proportions are being lost of that Faith which made our fathers what they were. Is no extant statement of that Faith usable by us to-day? While we are waiting for the man or school that will construct for us an absolutely satisfactory Confession of the Faith as twentieth-century men can accept it, can we meanwhile make no use, legitimate and helpful, of the creeds of the past?

Just here there rises up before us that venerable symbol of the Faith—the Apostles' Creed, coming down to us in outline at least

from the second century,¹ and accepted by the great bulk of Western Christianity, Catholic and Protestant alike.

For hundreds of years this symbol has been employed in public worship as a concise statement of the Christian attitude to God and the world, and as a stimulant of the sense of fellowship with (and, indirectly, of indebtedness to) our predecessors in the Faith. These centuries during which the Creed has thus been used saw many changes of thought, yet the Creed was not thereby antiquated or set aside; is the change which the last fifty years have brought us the first to be so drastic as to cut us off completely from earlier expressions of belief? Surely not. Surely it is not possible for quite unbridgeable ravines to yawn in the course of the progress of human thought: and there must be some way in which the old can serve the good ends of the new.

Of course no one in his senses would claim divine authority for this or any symbol of the Faith. The authorship of the Apostles'

¹ Swete, "The Apostles' Creed," pp. 14, 15.

Creed is quite unknown to us, and its original design is, under one aspect, a matter of grave dispute among scholars still. Nor can a document whose omissions are so numerous and startling¹ be regarded as in detail a complete presentation of the Christian Faith. Further, there are statements in the Creed extremely difficult to defend as they stand: and one statement at least seems to contradict the plain teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that this Symbol has been of immense value to the Church of Christ, and has done for the Church what no other document has done. "Perhaps," says Dr. McGiffert, "to it more than to anything else,—more even than to the Gospels, which were not widely read in the Middle Ages—we owe the fact that Jesus Christ is and always has been the Object of the Christian's faith, and that His figure has never been completely lost, even when the true Gospel has been most overlaid with scholastic philosophy or with sacramentarianism or ecclesiasticism."

¹ See note at the end of this volume.

What then can we do with a document like this? "To repeat the whole of it in the sense which was originally intended"¹ is impossible: to "repudiate it altogether" is most certainly wrong; such a course means willful self-improvement and self-disinheriting. There remains the possibility of using the Creed, if we be in general agreement with its drift, as the vehicle of an act of Faith in which we associate ourselves with our predecessors in the Church, while we hold ourselves free from the tyranny of words, and claim the legitimacy, when we require it, of changing the interpretation of the words of the symbol.

The question is, "Is such a use of the Creed morally justifiable?" I do not here attempt to reply to the question: the reply is spread over the lectures which follow. I have here only this to say: that I believe such a devotional use of the Creed to be both possible and desirable—a use which ought not to violate a conscience which is at once sensitive, humble and robust: and this use it is the purpose of these lectures to illustrate.

¹McGiffert, "The Apostles' Creed," p. 35.

LECTURE I[']
THE GOD WE TRUST

I believe in God the Father, Almighty,
Maker of Heaven and Earth

LECTURE I

THE GOD WE TRUST

THE heart of religion is self-committal to God. With impressive unanimity, students of the Christian faith and life find in this central act the secret of religious progress. The venturing of oneself and one's interests out upon the Being who, whatever be our ignorance about Him in other aspects, is felt to be the Source of our life and Fountain of our highest ideals—this in every circumstance, whether of joy or of stress, is the characteristic Christian attitude. And outside Christianity,—though probably under its influence and of course with varying degrees of clearness, and with conclusions of varying accuracy,—the same principle has been recognized, and its recognition has always made for spirituality.¹ “I entrust

¹ *E. g.*, The Bhakti movement in India, and the cult of Amida Buddha in Japan.

myself to God " is a sentence coming as near, probably, as any single sentence can come to a final formula of personal religion.

It is, at the outset, of the first importance for our devotional use of the Apostles' Creed that we should recognize that it is *this act of self-committal* that is indicated by its opening words, "I believe in:" an act of self-entrustment and not a mere expression of opinion or conviction. The construction of the verb "believe in" both in the Greek and Latin versions of the Creed precludes the idea of the bare expression of an opinion: what is expressed is an act of personal confidence. And the very first appeal which the Creed makes to our imagination is that in making it our own we are associating ourselves with countless hosts of our predecessors in the Faith in that which was the central act of their religious life as they gave themselves up to the God we trust.¹

It is fitted, surely, to brace a man for a day's task if, in the morning as he puts himself for direction and support into the hands

¹ Cf. Westcott, "Historic Faith," pp. 21, 22.

of God, he reflects that behind that act of his—associated with it, making it possible, giving it momentum—is the great volume of the confident acts of self-committal performed by the Church in the past. He may well say: “*They* looked unto Him and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed. *I* will trust and not be afraid.”

This interpretation of the words “I believe in” enables us at once to see the structure of the Creed. It is built around this act of self-committal thrice repeated. First, “I commit myself to God” (who is thereupon described in terms fitted to stimulate confidence); next, “I commit myself *with a like confidence* to Jesus” (who is thereupon described in terms of selected points in character, origin and career); finally, “I commit myself *with a like confidence* to the Holy Ghost” (who is described in terms of certain of His operations in human society).

Observe, there is here no dogma of a Trinity expressly stated. The “persons” who are presented as the objects of our confidence are not otherwise related *except* as the joint

objects of the confidence of a human soul. You are left to draw your own conclusions as to the identity or close relationship of these three "Persons," as you ask yourself the two questions : " Can there be more than one ultimate Object of absolute trust for a human soul? And, can the Object of Final Confidence be ever ought but God? " The Creed occupies as it were a pre-theological standpoint and a man does not need to avow himself a Trinitarian ere he can say or sing it. We shall see later that for the bewildered man of to-day there is much that at once rests and guides in this central idea of God (or of Christ, or of the immanent Spirit) as primarily the *Object of one's confidence* : through that practical act of trust one may come to all the theology one needs.

" I believe in God." This was, if I may use the expression, the first Christian Emphasis. The outstanding " note " of primitive Christianity was a joyous trust in the Supreme. " Ye turned," said Paul to his converts in Thessalonica, " from idols to God, to serve the living and the true God." The

faith of his converts he calls a "faith to Godward"; the gospel is the "Gospel of God"; the Christian life is a "walk worthy of God." And St. Peter writing to the Jews of the Dispersion reminds them how they owe to Christ right conceptions of God: it is "by Him," he says, that "ye believe in God." The whole effect of Christ's life and career had been that the faith and hope of the men who accepted Him was set, in a new confidence, upon God. Christ had made faith in the One God possible: He had made God trustworthy.

The subapostolic literature is equally strong in this monotheistic emphasis; and we may be quite sure that any version of Christianity is distorted and degenerate, in which this central truth is forgotten or obscured.

Now, unhappily, we who have long escaped from the confusions of paganism are apt to allow the truth that there is but one God—the Sole Home of the Confidence of men—to pass into the background unused. We are apt to assume it as an axiom of religion—and pass it by. It is understood to be a solid and

inalienable result of human enquiry and the universal decision of the best minds that if there be a God, there is at least only One : and there we tend to leave the matter. We are apt to forget that there are many ways in which our monotheism may be weakened and invalidated even at this late day. The testimony of history is that it is not easy for men to retain and live out faith in the unity of God : and that even where the doctrine has been nominally retained, it may by a hundred apostasies of the heart be invalidated. I cannot, for myself, see any lesson other than that of the instability of the equilibrium of this doctrine written across such facts in history as these : the lost monotheisms in paganism of which new evidence is all the time appearing : the story of Israel's persistent idolatry and of what has been called the prolonged endeavour to keep Jehovah in His true place : the lapse of the Christian Church in the early centuries, at least in Semitic lands, from her monotheism to the baptized paganism of hagiolatry : the maintenance in the Roman Church, side by side with the worship of God,

of a cultus and venerations which are a perpetual menace to the monotheism of the common people: the unblushing ditheism of certain types of Protestant evangelicalism in which a profound moral contrast was set up between the Divine Father and the Divine Son: and finally in certain features of the life of Christendom to-day, features totally inconsistent with a living monotheism—signs that the professed monotheism, though accepted as a matter of course and affirmed without hesitation is in practice invalidated and neutralized.

Among these features two are very marked: one is the prevalence of race-antagonisms, the other the recrudescence of superstition.

With regard to the first of these, we need to recover the thought which was so large a part of the burden of the greater Hebrew prophets, that a direct corollary of the truth of the unity of God is the essential unity of all persons within the area of His control: that if we divide humanity, we divide its God: that the man who hates and despises

his fellow man of whatever race or colour cannot rise above nor show in his character any other than the characteristic fruits of the worship of a local, departmental, that is to say, pagan deity. We are aghast to-day at the idea that so many of our forefathers could have thought the institution of slavery compatible with belief in and self-committal to One God : those who come after us will be not less horrified that we should suppose a healthy and powerful monotheism to be compatible with militarism and race-and colour-prejudice.

And unless care is taken we are likely to earn a like surprise by our tolerance of superstitions that mean reversion to Paganism, and the failure to accept the truth that there is One God with One Holy Design, as penetrating into every corner of life. Of these superstitions it is unnecessary to give detailed accounts here : but the denunciation by the prophet Isaiah of the tricks and devices of those who played upon the superstition of the people¹ is not antiquated. No

¹ Isaiah viii. 19.

Christian should countenance expressions and practices which encourage the notions of good and bad "luck," or of the possibility of foretelling the future, or of communications with the unseen world by means that are non-moral. The practically complete exclusion from the Bible of the idea of Chance is eloquent of the close connection of a holy and reasonable Purpose with the very idea of God : and a man who is weak in his belief (as he may be made weak by superstitious practices) that this purpose extends to and covers the minutiae of life is, so far forth, weak in his belief in the Unity and Sovereignty of God.

If, however, we are to trust ourselves to God, to venture ourselves upon the truth that He is One, and the world of men and things one in Him, we must rightly conceive of God : and here the titles which are given to Him in the Apostles' Creed are fitted to be a very real aid to us. God is called "the Father, Almighty (rather All-Sovereign), Maker of Heaven and Earth."

The order of these titles is not the order natural to the student either of Nature or of History. He rather tends to begin where the Creed's list of titles ends,—with God's relation to Nature. And many men of the world find it less embarrassing, in their ordinary references to God, to speak of Him as The Creator or our Maker, or "Providence" than to allude at all to His Fatherhood.

Nevertheless, the order in the Creed is the order of our need and of our hope. What we first need to know about God is His Disposition and Attitude towards us: is the Power behind and above the world *friendly* to us or is He not?

The answer of the Creed is the one word "FATHER." The word at once suggests that God is bound to us by ties which are unbreakable, and which lay upon Him certain obligations. It suggests that a man should find in God a certain element of the unalterable, a permanent ground for confidence. But unhappily the word "Father" may suggest anything from mere physical paternity to a relationship of the highest ethical and

disciplinary value. And it is here that occurs the first suggestion of our need of Jesus Christ, whose own claim upon our confidence lies just in this that He has given us an absolutely trustworthy God. For Jesus took that word "Father" which was the primitive conception of God, and so charged it with meaning that it has become and will be the ultimate conception of God. He found the conception local, and universalized it; tribal and individualized it; physical and moralized it. In this last particular He has rendered a service to humanity that is absolutely unique. The *quality* of the fatherhood which He attributed to God, its perfect combination of mercy and truth, intimacy and elevation, obligation and independence, is His own gift to the world, and is that after all which distinguishes Christianity from other religions. For if any one should ask us wherein is Christianity superior to other religions, it is best to reply "in the character of its God." It is not to be denied that Jesus, in this matter, built upon the foundation laid by the prophetic souls

in ancient Israel: yet He added by His words, person and career a something to that foundation which was His own; and that makes Him the supreme God-giver to men.

To some extent, part of the unique contribution which Jesus made towards the regulating of our conception of the Divine Fatherhood is represented by the Creed's next title ALL-SOVEREIGN.¹ For in us, the idea of Fatherhood, unstable in equilibrium, is ever apt to degenerate into a thought of indulgent and ministrant kindness and (at its worst) of a weak slavery to children's needs and even caprices, varied by fitful anger. Jesus Christ's recorded words show us how careful He was to surround the thought of the Divine Fatherhood by safeguards of reverence. "I thank thee, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth:"² "My Father who is in Heaven":³ "Holy Father": "O Righteous Father."⁴ Such phrases

¹ See Westcott, "Historic Faith," p. 36, and note V, p. 225.

² Matthew xi. 25.

³ Matthew xvi. 17.

⁴ John xvii. 11, 26.

abundantly attest His own thought of God, and plainly indicate the attitude He would have us take to God. He would have us ever remember, as we use the intimate name of Father, that God is over us, most Holy and most Free. Most free: *that* is All-Sovereign.

To-day the popularization of the thought of God's immanence in all that He has made is endangering our view of God's Holy Freedom. A man cannot trust a God who is imprisoned in the machinery He has set in motion. It may be true that such terms as Infinite and Absolute as applied to God, while useful in philosophy, are of little use to us in Religion: but most assuredly we do need the thought of His Holy Freedom. He is seen in nature and in Christ to be the Servant of man: but we cannot trust Him unless He is as Jesus said LORD of Heaven and Earth.

For the system of things in which we live is ever unfolding before us new situations, broader horizons, wider and more complicated problems. "We know not what is

coming on the Earth." If we are to commit ourselves into the hand of God, He must be free: and *adequate*.

"Adequate." The great crises in religion in the past have come when the discovery of new tracts of life has raised the question, "Is God, thy God, adequate?" It was so in the eighth century before Christ in Israel, when the larger world represented by the world-empires of Assyria and Egypt came up into the view of Israel, and when prophetic men perceived that everything, for the future of Israel's religion, depended upon the adequacy of her God to cover this new world with His claim and make good that claim.

To-day there is a new world opening out before us, the world given to us not only by scientific research into the realms of nature and society and the mind of man, but by the new openness of every part of the world to the influence of every other part. Have we a God who is All-Sovereign—who is "adequate"?

In a most eloquent passage in one of his books, President King asks this very ques-

tion. "We live," he says,¹ "in a world *enlarged* for our thought quite beyond the possibility of conception by earlier ages: enlarged in the infinite spaces of the revelations of astronomy: enlarged in the mighty reaches of time, measured not only by geological but by physical research: enlarged in perception of inner endless energy, microscopic as well as telescopic, and compelling our admission even far beyond all possibility of vision. A man cannot help asking himself in such a world 'Is thy God adequate to this *enlarged* universe?' And we live in a *unified* world: unified, too, beyond all possible earlier conception: unified in the thought of the universal forces of gravity and of magnetism: unified in the principle of the conservation of energy: a world that acts as one world, as though permeated by one will. . . . Is thy God adequate to this unified world?

"And whatever changes come in the great conception of evolution, mankind will never

¹ King, "The Moral and Religious Challenge of our Times," pp. 126 sqq.

escape again from the idea of an *evolving* world. Physics, biology, embryology, psychology, sociology, make it impossible for us to forget that man is, in some real sense, the goal of the whole physical universe containing within himself the promise of endless progress. . . . Is thy God adequate to this *evolving* world?

“And once more, with the emphasis of the whole of modern science on the conception of Law, men look in upon themselves and out upon the universe with other eyes : for the perception of law means discernment of the ways of the universe : means therefore insight into its secrets and power to use its exhaustless energies. The idea of law brings, thus, the glorious promise of world mastery and self-mastery—hope hitherto unimagined. Is thy God adequate to this great world of *law* ?”

“Adequate !” It is not so majestic as “All-Sovereign” : but it helps as no other word I know helps to express just that in the word “All-Sovereign” which makes appeal to our venturing self-committal. We can

lean on God the Father, because over against every possible emergency and perplexity and complication, He stands Lord, most adequate, most free.

“Maker of Heaven and Earth.” What do “Heaven” and “Earth” mean? Perhaps the readiest suggestion is that the words stand for the “unseen and the seen”—and both in the Creed of Nicæa and in the Creed of Constantinople the phrase at this point is used “maker of all things visible and invisible.” And it is good to know that one Supreme Mind controls both the world I see, and that other world to which I more intimately belong but which yet I cannot see—and that through that One Control both worlds are made one moral continuum. I commit myself to His keeping with an accentuated confidence as I recall the fact that in Him the universe visible and invisible is my Home and I cannot fall out of the reach of His hand.

But the words “Heaven and Earth” may carry more definite suggestion than this. It

is possible that they are a reminiscence of our Lord's utterance in Matthew xi. 26—"I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth:" and if they are, then the antithesis farther on in that utterance, between the "wise" and the "babes," forces upon the mind the idea that Heaven stands for the realm of the recondite, and Earth for the region of the simple.¹ "I thank Thee, Father, Lord of the recondite and Lord of the simple, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and knowing, and hast revealed them to the simple-hearted." God, then, is the God of scientific research and the God of simple piety. If we could but remember this obvious platitude, we would trust more confidently that the careful study of His work will in the end lead men nearer to Himself. We should be guiltless of the heresy that we must sacrifice our intellects if we are to become good Christians; we should feel if we be engaged in research or in difficult and complicated enterprise that there too we may find and commit ourselves to God who is

¹ Cf. the use of "earthly and heavenly" in John iii.

above and within all such efforts, the true Maker of the world they help to make ; while on the other hand, if we be simple folks, constitutionally devout, we should not timidly shrink from nor distrust enquiry as though it would take our God from us. The God of the laboratory and the God of the prayer-meeting are one : and in the act of self-committal the wise ones and the babes go hand in hand.

But once more, "Heaven and Earth" may mean just what we mean when we say nature and mind : the world without and the world within. I do not know that there is anything our religion needs to-day more than that it should be delivered from the curse of overdone introspection, be carried bodily out into the open air, and made to feel the breath of the breezes and the fragrance of the grass. Most of us, when we are dealing with religion, are dealing with what we call the "interior life"—thoughts, plans, aspirations, regrets, ecstasies. And we do need Divine guidance for and interpretation of this inner

life. But we have forgotten the sanctity of Nature and her need of a spiritual interpretation : we have forgotten the interest of God in those resources of Nature, her fruits, her fabrics, her wealth of life on which our lives depend. The consequence is our "acts of faith" and self-entrustment are lamentably partial : God is excluded from what is often the most vividly active of our interests : and we are exposed to the danger on the one hand of a sham spirituality—on the other hand of a relation to the things of the external world which is immoral, selfish, wasteful, irreverent. Is it not a sham spirituality which occupies itself wholly with ideas of the inner life, and not at all with trees and birds and the right use of all there is in Nature about us ?

Do we handle the products of Nature as if they were sacraments, remembering how Jesus *taking bread* said, "This is My body" ? Do we ever think of a tree as a minister, a vehicle, a garment of God ? May it not be that this is why our personal religion has been so dry, jejune, unreal, because to en-

gage in it, we have withdrawn from the outside world where our abiding interest really is, from the world in which our work is—to find “the God we trust” in a region more interior, shadowy, uncharted and remote?

Truth to tell, we have found the air of that interior region difficult to breathe; and we have been glad to escape again into the secular life with its stir, its alertness, its variety. But it is we, and not the religion, that have been at fault. We have forgotten the simple truth that God is Lord of nature as well as of mind; that He is maker of Earth as well as of Heaven; and that the same kind of trust is needed for our plunge into both these realms.

If we daily practise an act of self-committal like this, we cannot but gain by the adjustments that must ensue.

We shall tend to see life's warring contradictions resolved into harmony. It is when we take a superficial view of life that it bears the aspect of contradiction. If we believe in God, we throw ourselves out upon the

belief that there is a unity behind all dissonance and conflict. It is this belief that urges on the student of nature in his researches: and indeed it is the scientific man to-day, and not the ecclesiastic who is the really powerful and enthusiastic preacher and prophet of unity—and he has his reward in the fact that it is to him and not to the priests that men of the world are really looking for the last authoritative word about life. Dedicating ourselves each day to “God the Father All-Sovereign, maker of Heaven and Earth,” we in effect dedicate ourselves to the cause of peace; we renounce the partisan, the sectarian, the polemical: we refuse to acquiesce in schism ecclesiastical, intellectual, racial: and beyond the turmoil and crash of conflict we hear the song of reconciliation and the welcome Home.

God is the Maker of Heaven and Earth: their Maker *now*. The word is gravely misunderstood if it be rendered “He who once made long ago.” God is even now making Heaven and Earth, *and making man for both*.

I believe in God, the present Maker and fashioner of Heaven and Earth, and I am *His* sub-maker. He is Creator; I am sub-creator: appointed not actually to create out of nothing, but so to arrange part of the material He has made (and which He has placed before me not in order, nor yet in utter chaos but in an alluring disorder with the suggestion of order at its heart) as that out from my work may proceed an orderly structure on which another may build, and so the worlds be made.

When then I commit myself to Him, it is not that I may lie in His hands, passive, inert, secure. My self-entrustment to Him is only that He may rightly regulate my work: that I may be spared the loss of energy misdirected and futile, that I may not miss the best that Life is meant to yield, that I may fulfill my part in the vast but single purpose for which all things and men have come and are coming to be.

There is much in one that rebels against this act of self-committal. I am in haste to act alone, and reach, without the pride-

offending submission to Divine control, the goal of life. But in a soberer moment I know this impatient independence is foolishness : not that way lies success, or self-command or peace. So I return to God : with my forefathers and predecessors who have owned His supremacy I bow my stubborn will, and say "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth : I put my little hand in the hand of the Creator of the ends of the earth. *I must be true to the responsibilities of that holy alliance.*"

LECTURE II
GOD'S HUMAN COUNTERPART

. . . and in Jesus Christ His
only Son our Lord

LECTURE II

GOD'S HUMAN COUNTERPART

THE Apostles' Creed, as we have seen, registers that act of self-commitment to the living God which our forefathers in the Christian Faith found the centre of their religion. But now that trustful self-commitment is directed not only towards God the Father; it is directed also to Jesus Christ. That is to say, if we are right in our interpretation of the phrase "I believe in," the Creed in effect calls upon those who would associate themselves with the Christians of the past to commit themselves to and lean upon Jesus Christ with the same implicit confidence which it asks them to put in the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth.

The Creed nowhere expressly identifies Jesus with God: but it does this stronger thing—it invites us to give Christ the *same*

kind of confidence that we give to the living God, and it encourages us to do this by the description it gives of Christ's person, origin and career.

I suppose that no more astonishing proposition than this has ever been made to the intellect of man. In the history of the human mind there is nothing more astounding than the suggestion that men should trust Jesus as they would trust God, unless it be the wide acceptance with which the suggestion has been welcomed. For there has never, so far as is known, existed a saner, purer, more progressive body of thought than that which is represented by the minds that have accepted this astonishing proposal.

The wonder of the suggestion is enhanced when we remember its source. The apostles of Christ were strong believers in the unity of God, and the God in whom they believed was "high and lifted up"; a God exalted, who had stretched out the heavens; a God whom no man might see and live. Yet these men, with this conception of God, came to trust a man, Jesus, as God: to pay to Jesus

the highest honour a man can pay even to a God, namely, to entrust themselves, their future, their all to His care, judgment, and disposal. Out of that trust, apparently—out of the discovery that Christ was utterly trustworthy, that He proved adequate in His response to that trust—out of this arose their belief that He was God and the ultimate formulation of that belief in theological statement. *But the experience of the trustworthiness came before the theology.* They had found Christ, as a matter of fact, discharging for them the offices of God, doing the things they needed God for, dispensing divine blessings and in this practical way bringing home to them His claim to *be* God.

And is not this the way that ordinary persons must still proceed if they are to deal with Christ in a real way? There is no religion in *saying* that Jesus is God: just as there is none in denying it. For what is "God"? Whatever else we mean by that word, we must mean That upon which ultimately we rest—the last Rock of security, the ultimate shelter of our souls. The only way in which

we can discover whether Jesus and this God are one is by testing in actual practice the adequacy of Christ as the ultimate Refuge of men : by leaning on Him, venturing upon Him and observing whether, to put it plainly, He bears the strain.

This it would appear the Apostolic circle did. They responded to Christ's amazing invitation, " Lean on God, lean also on Me " : and they found He bore the strain.

And I think the words in the Creed descriptive of Jesus give us some help in understanding some of the grounds of that so splendid, and so splendidly-vindicated trust.

First of all, note the word " Christ."

That single title at once places Jesus in His true historical situation : and could we but grasp the full significance of the fact that Jesus has made good His claim to be the Jewish Messiah, we would begin to understand one of the strongest grounds of our fathers' faith in Him. The trouble is that " Christ " has come to be to us Western Gentiles little more than a cognomen of

Jesus, a sort of honourable surname, and its wealth of historical suggestion is unused by us: and because it is unused we are extremely apt to fall into the wide-spread modern intellectual vice of abstracting Jesus from His historical background, and of contemplating Him as an ideal figure, as though the background did not add to the significance of the figure.

But Jesus cannot be understood, nor can the unbounded confidence of the Church in Him be understood, until His background is taken into account, that background which prepared for Him but does not altogether explain Him—which He at once leans back upon and transcends.

What does the word "Christ" stand for? First of all, the word stands for the consummation of a national history in which there had been a peculiarly impressive revelation of God: an unfolding of God which, setting out from very humble beginnings, grew in volume, and in purity and in spiritual suggestiveness, until now it "gladdens half the world," and is the foundation of the

only thought of God which there is any hope that the world as one will ever accept. It is worth our while to recall this fact because in our time we are apt to lay an exaggerated stress upon the apprehension of God in "heathen" lands. It is true that God has not anywhere left Himself without witness: but it is simply not true, so far as human research has gone, that any nation in pre-Christian days is known to have possessed an account of God at all approaching the thought of God which was Israel's treasure. This is not the place to illustrate or prove this in detail: but no man could make a worse blunder than to gather from books and articles upon the Orient the impression that there was nothing *unique* in the significance for the world of the knowledge of God developed in Israel's history. Now it is as the consummation of that story of an increasing and unique knowledge of God that Jesus "the Christ" appeared. The labours of the prophets of Israel—some of them men of far-flung name but most of them anonymous persons, representing a stream of re-

ligious influence and a body of religious insight which is (except in Christianity) without parallel in the history of the world—the labours of these men lay behind and prepared the way for Jesus, whose teaching and person and history filled full the anticipations which the prophets had based on their thought of God. Our belief that Jesus is the Christ rests not on any “claims” He is alleged to have made to a mere title, but on the demonstrable correspondence of His teaching, person and career with the thoughts of the prophets, interpreting the history of the Jewish people.

That correspondence is of course much more than mere verbal agreement. It amounts to a re-announcement by Jesus (not in word only but in His life) of the central idea that underlay the position of Israel among the peoples of the world. What was that idea? However much we, looking on only a few disparaging facts, may flout the notion, the fact remains and will be taken seriously by serious students of history, that the rôle of Israel among the nations

was to be *God's missionary*. Thoughtful men studying the very peculiar course of the history of that peculiar people, perceiving their separateness from other peoples alike in temperament and in experience, early came to the conclusion that Israel had not been meant for political or artistic greatness but that her function in history was to mediate religion, to make known to men something of the nature, disposition and purposes of the God whom no man hath seen nor can see. Among the prophets, the favourite metaphor for the expression of this idea was that of the Vine. The vine impressed the Palestinian people by its uselessness for building purposes—it was meet for no work¹—men could not take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon¹—it lived solely for fruit. Israel was God's vine, set aside not for beauty nor for power, but tended and disciplined solely that it might bear spiritual fruit.

But it is notorious that Israel rebelled against this rôle in history : rebelled so stub-

¹ Ezekiel xv. 3-5.

bornly and so persistently that the prophets were fain to believe that surely God would fulfill His end by at least a faithful remnant of the people, or at least by some One in whom the idea of Israel should be incarnate, —One Anointed of God for this representative and vicarious position. Now as a matter of fact, it is this that Jesus has done: He has taken that thought of God which was vouchsafed to Israel, and in His own person and word and work has effectually mediated it to the world. He has been the greatest of all missionaries: His life the most rich in spiritual fruit-bearing of all lives. Was this in His mind when He said "I am the True Vine"?

This at least the word Christ stands for. I do not for a moment forget that it stands for much more than this: but I am content just here to remind my reader that when we speak of Jesus as Christ, we compress into two words two convictions; first, that within the history of Israel there lay embedded the Divine design to exhibit through Israel to the world with special clearness what it is

essential to progress that man should know about God : and secondly, that that process of self-revelation finds its consummation and most succinct expression in Jesus.

It will be seen at once how convictions like these *prepare the mind for confidence in Jesus*, as Himself issuing from God, in pursuance and completion of a plan manifest before He came.

Let us pass to the next phrase, " His Only Son." It is little short of disastrous for our personal faith that a phrase like this should first suggest a theological idea, and not an historical impression : and we cannot recover its full value for faith until we remember the simple fact that the phrase originally crystallized the apostolic impression of Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth was distinguished among men for the peculiar quality of His personal religious life. That quality—a peculiar blend of holy intimacy and submissive reverence—impressed His contemporaries as *filial* : as John said, " We beheld His glory," *i. e.*, His distinctive characteristic ; " and it was that

of an only begotten son of a father." Note the article *an*. John was no more than any other of Jesus' friends prepared for the idea of God's having a Son. But here was One beside Him, His friend and teacher, who really did so carry Himself as to suggest that He was the intimate Son of God. It was a new thing in the world. It was easy to add the word "only begotten" because as a matter of fact such behaviour as the behaviour of Jesus towards God had never been seen among men. (For that matter, it has never been seen since.)

What was so fascinating about this type of religious life was not simply that it was new, but that it answered to a longing of the human heart. "This," men said, "is what we ought to be. This is what we have been trying to be, but we knew not how to win to this perfect blend of confidence and fear, intimacy and reverence."

It had been a hidden ideal, an aspiration of the human, especially of the Jewish heart, to combine confidence and fear in filial worship, doing justice to the two aspects of

God, His mercy and truth, His justice and kindness.¹ When Jesus came men said, "Truly this man has realized what we have sought to be. Truly this is the Son of God."

I have just said that so wonderful a religious deportment has never been seen since. There have been no successful imitators of Jesus in this regard. There have been no other "sons of God" like Him: He stands alone. If it is objected that St. John says, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God," I remark upon that, first that the word here translated "sons" means really little children: and further, that the passage proceeds, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that . . . we shall be like Him." Then we are not like Him now! We have to pass through some change before we shall be like Him, and the change is so great that we have no name for it: no name for that which we shall be, when we shall be adult sons of God, like Jesus.

For what is a Son? It is not enough, surely, to say that the word means one who

¹See Psalm cxvii.

is the offspring of his father, or who strongly resembles him, or who is brought up in his house. The beautiful and sacred name of "son" has not its meaning filled full until it is seen to mean one who, bearing himself towards his father with perfect trust and perfect reverence, is met by the father's love with an answering confidence, is admitted into the father's counsels, and *entrusted with the father's resources*. In this full sense was Jesus the Son of God: and He alone. We are not yet fit to be entrusted with our Father's resources. Through much discipline as yet not undergone must we rise to that dominion over God's works which according to the ancient Psalm is appointed for us. "Thou hast made him (Man) to have dominion over the works of Thy hands." But we see not yet Man possessing this dominion. Man is not yet a grown son. He is an infant of God. But we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour. For He has never failed in His Sonship. He drew His breath in the fear of the Lord. Every word and act, every use of men and things,

every hope and judgment and purpose related of Christ, was not only "worthy of God," predicable, that is, of the Supreme Himself without exciting in us the sense of incongruity or irreverence ; but standing where He does in history, the personage whom these words and acts make up stands out before us as most evidently "coming forth from God,"—His *alter ego* and earthly representative for the fulfillment of His holy designs. It is the vision of this unique relationship of Jesus to God—a vision, let me repeat, anterior to all theologizing,—that in part accounts for the otherwise inexplicable fact that the sanest and best of humanity's sons have given to Jesus a like confidence to that which they give to the Supreme.

Let us look now reverently at the words "our Lord." If we tenaciously maintain the point of view which it is the business of these lectures to commend, viz., that reading the Apostles' Creed we are looking as through a window into the hearts of our fathers in the faith as they daily renewed their self-surrender to God, we shall at once see that the

phrase "our Lord" is no title of honour merely, but reflects the awe of the first Christians in the presence of the Master.

I do not forget that there was in the word from the first the thought of our Lord's "exaltation to the right hand of God": but we are not even there at the headwaters of His Lordship—for these we must go back to the thrill of His august presence, the awe of His sheer moral eminence.

It was said of Henry Drummond by an admiring friend, "when he was present he reduced the rest of us to the peasantry." Let us carry over that beautiful tribute and apply it reverently to the Lord Jesus Christ. The very first fact about Him is that He reduced "the rest to the peasantry": that He was naturally Leader and Lord.

I believe that if we take up the Gospel of St. Mark in quest of a fresh impression of the personality of Jesus, we shall be struck first and foremost with the place of leadership which is conceded to Him on every hand.¹

¹ See F. G. Peabody, "The Character of Christ," *Hibbert Journal*, Vol. I, p. 641.

Men bow to His word, and to His will. One can see that in part this surrender is homage to His startling knowledge of men, of their hearts and prospects : is tribute, too, to the powers He evidently possesses, and most of all perhaps to His miraculous self-poise and self-control. But however we analyze the fact, the fact is there : Jesus was naturally Lord, precisely Lord.

We can see that the awe was not simply the stare and numbness of the hypnotized : but a genuine fear of the holiness that was in Him. The "fear of Christ" of which St. Paul speaks in his letter to the Ephesians (v. 21) was a tremendous reality in the apostolic mind. It is not recalled only by such a verse as this "and they were in the way going up to Jerusalem : and Jesus went before them : and they were amazed : and as they followed they were afraid" :¹ it is suggested by the attitude of the apostolic mind to that judging effect of Christ's presence, which according to His own statement was due to no set design of His,² but which nevertheless

¹ Mark x. 32.

² John xii. 47.

was then and has continued to be perhaps the most forcible of the outcomes of His advent in the world.

For as the Church widened out, the stability and range of His authority increased with it. Jesus was at first Lord ¹ of a small group of men and women : but as time went on, and men and women of alien races heard of Him, His Masterhood persisted and expanded : and to-day He alone has made His judging presence, His moral and spiritual leadership felt all round the globe. Jesus was never so widely acclaimed as Lord as He is to-day.

Now observe the cumulative force of all this. At a point and place in history where a long and patiently conducted discipline of a selected people in the knowledge of the unseen God had come to a crisis, there appears One who is a scion of that race, in whom the Divine idea for the people, rejected and de-

¹ The formula " Jesus Lord " was probably the Church's very earliest " Creed." See 1 Cor. xii. 3. Cf. Acts x. 36 and Acts xix. 5.

spised by them, stands incarnate. He manifests a type of behaviour towards God that accredits Him not only as fulfiller of a Divine purpose but as issuing from a place of unexampled intimacy in the Divine Heart. Men see in Him the realization of that which they have longed for, their Leader, Lord, and Judge.

Is it any wonder that in the midst of men's bewilderment about the Unseen, they should find joy and relief in entrusting themselves to this Jesus as to a Mediator who, they believed, could lead them *all the way to God*? Is it any wonder that it is as Priest He should be pictured by one who had known Him intimately ;¹ not the Priest of ecclesiastical office, but the Priest of natural divine endowment? The Epistle to the Hebrews, that wonderful book which construes Jesus as High Priest—an interpretation which, considering the remoteness of Jesus of Nazareth from anything like sacerdotal office, takes rank as one of the greatest intellectual *tours de force* in literature—really rests upon the

¹ Rev. i.

twin impressions made by Jesus on His contemporaries—His intimacy with God, His mastery of men : *God's* only Son, *our* Lord.

On these two foundations rest the pillars of His Throne as the Arch-priest of Humanity, the Captain of its salvation : and even were our Formula for the Act of faith amputated here, it would be good for us to say each day, "I commit myself and those I love to God the Father, All-Sovereign who is making the Heaven and the Earth, *and* to Jesus, the Christ, His only Son, our Lord."

LECTURE III
FROM GOD THROUGH DEATH

Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary, suffered un-
der Pontius Pilate, was crucified dead
and buried. He descended into Hell

LECTURE III

FROM GOD THROUGH DEATH

IT was a logical necessity, surely not difficult to understand, that some account of the origin of Jesus should find its way into the Apostles' Creed. For a figure which could be described by the terms "Christ," "God's only Son," "our Lord"—could not but challenge the interest of men as to the manner of His coming into the world: and if there were ought about that coming fitted to strengthen still further the confidence of those who "put their trust in Him," it was natural that some hint of that feature should find a place in the Formula of Reliance.

But why, out of all that might be said of the origin of Jesus, did the Church select these two difficult phrases "Conceived by the Holy Ghost," "Born of the Virgin Mary"? That the former phrase was much later in its

entrance into the Formula than the latter, does not greatly help us here. Each phrase must represent the design to emphasize some feature of our Lord's origin calculated to stimulate confidence in Him.

Let us look at the first phrase, "Conceived by the Holy Ghost." It is not difficult to see that the object of this reference to the first beginnings of Jesus' earthly life is to lay emphasis upon the *immediacy of His origin in God*: that men might be assured that in dealing with Christ they are dealing with one for whom down to the very roots of His being God is responsible, and who represents the unsullied thought of God incarnate.

This, however, is expressed by a phrase which draws the mind towards an obscure and quite incomprehensible physiological process. Such a movement of the mind can have no religious value for persons living in the twentieth century. A knowledge, however accurate, of physiological detail regarding the mode of the coming of my Saviour into being cannot be an essential and indis-

pensable element in my religion. And yet I need the thought which, as I believe, it was the design of those who inserted this phrase ultimately to convey : that the immediate background of the life of Jesus is the life and thought of God. What then am I to do with the phrase "Conceived by the Holy Ghost"? I shall boldly read it as if it meant "Conceived in the mind of God." It will be at once objected that this is torturing the plain meaning of the word "conceived," and that only by a piece of ludicrous linguistic dishonesty can the phrase be shifted from the plane of terrestrial miracle, to the plane of the Divine mind, that in simple English, it is the human mother of Jesus who "conceived" Him and not the Divine Spirit. I unhesitatingly reply that language is made for man, and not man for language : that I will use this phrase not so as necessarily to evade the physiological reference, but assuredly so as to trace that to its roots and give it religious value. I need, as I have said, the thought that in the uttermost parts of His being there shall be no gap between this Christ on whom

I am asked to rely, and the Ultimate God. If it be objected that this could surely be expressed more felicitously than by the phrase "Conceived by the Holy Ghost," I reply, Possibly : but I am thankful for that phrase, not only for its Scriptural and historic association, but because it reminds me that Jesus is not represented as having come down from heaven full-grown as Athene from the brain of Zeus : but that God presided over and infilled with His Spirit the most intimate beginnings of His life on earth, as though to teach us that God Himself by undelegated power meant to redeem our life to its inmost springs and centre.

One recalls how concerned Jesus Himself was that His spiritual background should be acknowledged and revered. "Make what comment you will," He used to say, "upon the Son of Man : but beware how you flout the Divine Spirit that is behind and within His acts." "What think you," He said once, "in this matter of the Christ, whose son is He?" It is absurd to suppose that Jesus meant to require of men accurate

knowledge of the mystery of His birth : I do not believe that that was in all His thoughts. He pressed for an answer to the searching question, "Who is behind Me, and responsible for Me? Do I or do I not represent God's thought, and bear God in upon your lives?"

It is this that I believe is the important thing in, and constitutes the religious worth of the phrase "Conceived by the Holy Ghost,"—that it emphasizes the responsibility of God for all that Jesus from the beginning was.

Students of Scripture know how careful the Bible representation of Christ is to recall to us the constant presence of the Divine mind in the impulses of His life : not only in the beginnings of His life but in its growth, in its crises of endowment and trials, in its utterances in word and deed, in its culminating sacrifice and in its triumphant issues. It does distinctly add a new emphasis to our confidence in Him when we recall the fact that He is conceived by the Holy Ghost, that we see in Him the thought of God—not

the after-thought but the age-long thought—turned towards us in loving and saving expression.

“Born of the Virgin Mary.” We come now to a phrase which most unhappily is to many in our time a hindrance to the devotional use of the Apostles’ Creed. I cannot but think that this is in large part due to a misunderstanding of what I may call the original atmosphere of the phrase, to a prominence now before people’s minds far greater than the phrase was designed to give it, of the idea of physiological miracle. The expression “Mary the Virgin” is, to begin with, quite evidently an instrument of identification: and we do not lay hold of this matter by the right end unless we think first of the personality, and not the virginity, of our Lord’s Mother. The phrase is not “born of a virgin,” but “born of Mary”: a personage notable and known. This distinction is not an excessive subtlety: it is not an evasion of the question of miracle (to which we shall come later): it is simple fidelity to the Scrip-

tural representation. There the emphasis is not on miracle, but on a different matter altogether—upon the religious background and experience of the Lord's Mother.

Mary stands in the New Testament story for the product of a long discipline, the flower of human piety. She is introduced to us as standing in the heart of a social group in Israel most sharply distinguished in temper and outlook from the nation as a whole. There are preserved to us poetic utterances of that group—one of the most beautiful, the *Magnificat*, being attributed to Mary herself—which reflect a very advanced stage of religious culture. Their authors, who "waited for the consolation of Israel" were evidently persons who had studied the history of their people for themselves, were cherishing their own interpretation of that history—an interpretation in sharpest variance with the popular secularized ideas. In devout and unobtrusive piety they waited on God, while the "obscene tumult" of the people's godless life roared without. As we contemplate this group, we cannot but recognize in them

that Remnant which the Prophets declared would remain and from whose heart Messiah should come.

At the centre of this group stands the mother of Jesus: versed in the sacred history and poetry of her people: carrying herself with the calm and dignity which are begotten of holy intimacy with the Divine thought: habitually regarding herself as the Lord's handmaiden, and ready, to the point of sacrifice, for His service: and cherishing we know not what aspirations and hopes regarding the Messias who was to be. If the white centre of the field of human piety at the time of Christ's coming were to be searched for, where could it be more hopefully looked for than here? And who amongst women was so fitted to be the mother of the Christ, as she on whom the discipline of "the peculiar people" during the ages had descended as an inheritance and who had so wonderfully responded to that training? Is it not just this that lies within the affluent title given in the Ave Maria: "Hail—full of grace!"

Scientists tell us that when man was made, there was chosen out from the forms then existing in the world that organism which was most fitted to receive the new life which has made Man what he is. If that be a true account of our physical descent there is a curious analogy between that and the birth of our Lord. It would seem as though when God would bring into the world the Higher Man, Head of the New Humanity, He chose the highest available organism from the spiritual point of view—Mary of Nazareth: far enough removed, it is true, from the perfections of the Supreme, but possessing the highest human capacity for submission to the Divine designs, the product and resultant of God's most anxious training of a selected people in the knowledge and service of Himself.

The service, then, which so far the phrase "born of Mary the Virgin" renders to our confidence in Jesus, is that it confirms the witness of the word "Christ" to the fact that Jesus came forth *not by chance or unaccountably* either as to time or place, but at a

unique crisis in the world's religious history and at the very focus of the Divine discipline of men.

But now we confront the word Virgin. And here again what is supremely important is the attitude in which we approach the story which alleges the virgin-birth of Jesus.

(1) The man who by the sheer force of the evidence presented—chiefly by the august moral eminence of Jesus—has become convinced that in Jesus of Nazareth God has really come into the world, that man will bear himself calmly, reverently, dispassionately in presence of the question of the manner and mode of His coming. It is the grossest travesty upon the position of the Christian Church to say that it demands of its members belief in the virgin-birth as though that were the basis of the Christian faith. The virgin-birth was no part of the earliest known presentation of the Gospel, either by our Lord or by His Apostles. While later it became sadly prominent in controversies with unbelievers, the early Church reproduced the reverent reticence of the Blessed Mother herself, and of the apostolate, and

Ignatius spoke of the virgin-birth of our Lord as a mystery wrought in the silence of God. One desiderates a like reverence and reticence in our approach to the subject to-day. One deplores the assurance, flippancy, ease and even indelicacy with which so many, even among our young people, are ready to discuss the virgin-birth of Jesus. That temper but too loudly proclaims that those who show it have not followed the order of the Creed in the order of their thought. For, first, the Creed sets before us with an awed impressiveness the person of Jesus—"The Christ, God's only Son, our Lord": and only then goes on to speak of the mode of His coming. It behoves us to observe that same order: first let the personal greatness of the Christ tell fully on our minds,—and then in the matter of His Birth into our life as well as in the matter of His Resurrection, His Birth into a higher human life, we shall be cleansed of *à priori* dogmatism and *parti pris*.

(2) Next, all candid souls who desire to come at the truth upon this question will, having read other things about the virgin-

birth, be careful to read the story itself. The great Scottish Hebraist, Dr. A. B. Davidson, once reviewing a commentary on the prophet Ezekiel by a German professor, said this: "Professor ——— seems to have read every commentary on the prophet Ezekiel, and he has done very well. When he shall have read the prophet himself, he will do better." Have we recently read again the story of the nativity in St. Matthew and St. Luke? One wonders that any man or woman of pure mind, haunted by the glory of the Christ, could read, say, the first two chapters of St. Luke and note how steeped they are in the story of God's prior discipline of His people, and how holy, elevated, reticent and virgin-chaste the story is, without becoming convinced that in the deepest sense the story is true, and meant to convey the truth. This does not mean that perplexities may not remain and a waiting silence take the place of loud and confident assertion: but it does mean that within these perplexities will be thrust a quiet faith that behind this narrative, as behind a curtain through which we cannot

quite clearly see, there lies the truth our hearts so sorely need: that in Jesus of Nazareth there is a veritable incoming into our humanity of a Saviour who, one of ourselves in human parentage, yet shares the universal life of God, and brings that Life to bear upon the needs of every type of man.

(3) For let us clearly apprehend what are the issues involved in the disquietude about the virgin-birth. It is the question whether humanity can rear its own Saviour, whether indeed it needs a Saviour at all. We are told sometimes with a hurt surprise that if we believe the virgin-birth, we take away from men the Christ who is "one of themselves" and substitute a Being separate, apart. "Whosoever makes the demand," it has been said, "that an Evangelical Christian shall believe in the words 'Conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary,' wittingly constitutes himself a sharer in a sin against the Holy Spirit of the true Gospel."¹ Of the Gospel, that is to say, of

¹ Cf. "Doctrinal Significance of a Miraculous Birth," *Hibbert Journal*, Vol. II, pp. 125 ff.

Christ's comradeship and oneness with our humanity.

The answer to this is really in two parts. The first, which I do not here elaborate, would raise the question whether the virgin-birth of our Lord does not really emphasize and better account for that peculiar "humanity" which was His.¹ But the second part is this. It is true that we need the comradeship and sympathy of one like ourselves. But we need more than sympathy—we need control. The souls who before us have struggled mingle their tears with ours, and their sympathy goes a little way to mitigate the loneliness of our conflict, while the knowledge of every victory they have gained encourages our heart and renews our hope. But what we need far more deeply than sympathy is the sense of being upborne by the living God: of being reached to by a heavenly hand, and held by a heavenly grasp. And He who is to bring this heavenly embrace about my sinking spirit

¹See C. A. Briggs, "The Fundamental Christian Faith," p. 111.

must be, not another of my struggling brothers, but as the Epistle to the Hebrews with keener insight says, a "high priest, holy, harmless, undefiled and *separate*."

It is this accent upon separateness which somehow is conveyed by the story of the virgin-birth of our Lord: and in the presence of the total failure of destructive criticism to *disprove* the story, there is no need for us, at this present hour, to dispossess ourselves of the religious value that lies in the recollection it conveys ever tending to readjust the balance of our too narrow thoughts of Christ, *of His apartness from us as He stoops to save*.

From the Birth of Christ the Creed makes an astonishing leap to His death. The whole beautiful story of our Lord's life up to His Passion—His deeds of kindness and power, His words of wisdom and love—all this is passed over in a silence which is at first thought distressing and disappointing. The very things that are most prominent in the preaching of to-day—the incidents of

teaching and beneficence recorded especially in the Synoptic Gospels—these are conspicuous by their absence: it is no wonder if in many quarters of the Church the Apostles' Creed has faded from regard!

It is curious that a similar omission is evident in the writings of St. Paul. Everybody knows that St. Paul says little or nothing about the miracles and the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot suppose that he was indifferent to these details of our Lord's life. He may not have known them before his conversion, but we cannot but believe that if not before then at least during the memorable visits to Peter, and afterwards to the leaders of the Church of Jerusalem St. Paul must have heard and drunk in the stories of our Lord's sayings and doings from those who had "compained with Him from the first." But his comment, even on these occasions of delightful fellowship is, "They added nothing to me." That is to say, his essential gospel remained what it had been before: the gospel which this section of the Creed so briefly epitomizes—the heavenly

origin of Jesus Christ, His sufferings and death, His resurrection and ascension.

May we not find the secret of the omission in *that act of self-committal on which the Creed is pivoted?* Were the Creed a résumé of the most interesting and illuminating features of Christianity as a system of thought or institutions, were it addressed to or supposed to be repeated by a student, the omission of all reference to the preaching and teaching of Jesus would be unthinkable. But the Creed is meant to be the utterance not of a student of religion, but of a helpless soul throwing itself out upon God. And if any Being is to share with the Ultimate God the utter confidence of a naked human soul, that Being must give guarantees not so much of wisdom and kindliness, as first of an immediate origin in God, and next of having belted the whole round of human need and tragedy by His redemptive experience and acts. As a student, I may admire the Lord Jesus in the rôle of sociologist, I may be deeply interested in His teaching: but as a sinful, weak and dying man I need a Christ

who credibly issuing from Heaven reaches all the way down to me—ay, not to me as men see me, but to the death I see advancing and to the hell I deserve. I care not if the words are gruesome and impolite : He, into whose hand I, fearing judgment, place my soul in utter reliance, must know the deepest depths that are possible to human experience ; and there are times when what I need is that *a man should go to hell for me*. Paul, whose hands were stained with blood when he first met Christ, knew this, and the ground of his trust in Christ was his conviction that Christ had come from the very throne of God and for him, Paul, had given Himself up to die, had experienced the awful contents of death in their entirety and vanquishing death had risen to the highest, triumphant. Hence what found prominence in Paul's gospel were the great cardinal crises of the Messiah's career : His Birth, His Crucifixion, His Death, His Burial, His Descent into the abode of the dead, and His rising again to Heaven. God be thanked for all the light that can be thrown upon or seen to flow from the teach-

ings of our Lord. But they will not by themselves constitute a religion for sinful men. A man may see his duty with exasperating clearness, and yet be impotent to perform it. And no version of Christianity will save men and out of weakness make men strong even though it incisively expound our Lord's words, if it leaves unemphasized or gives secondary place to the great redemptive crises, in life and death, of His vicarious career.

The phrase, "suffered under Pontius Pilate" deserves attention by itself. The introduction of Pilate's name into the Creed is one of the most remarkable features of the document: but it serves a double purpose. To begin with, the phrase marks a definite point of time ("under" may mean no more than "in the time of") and so serves to emphasize the reality of our Lord's sufferings. Certain tendencies of thought in the early Church required that this emphasis upon the historic actuality of our Lord's experiences should be made. And these tendencies or their curious counterparts and reproductions

are among us still. An indifference to history, a scorn of the value of historic fact, a relegation of religion to the realm of ideas only—this tendency appears especially in circles of a special type of culture. But the *whole self* of the man who is casting about for a Rock of Security and trembling on the edge of an Act of Faith—does not live in the realm of ideas, but realizes itself out in the field of current history. There it has sinned and been weak: there it must die. And *there*, accordingly, *must it find its Saviour*. True, it is the action of mind upon the historic events that gives rise at once to the need, and then to the discovery of the Saviour. That is to say, ideas interpreting the historic facts are essential. But they are naught without the facts. “A religion,” said Coleridge, “that is a true religion, must consist of ideas and facts both: not ideas alone without facts, for then it would be a mere philosophy: nor of facts alone without ideas of which these facts are the symbols, and out of which they arise and on which they are grounded, for then it would be mere history.”

But "Pontius Pilate" stands for more than the bare fact of history: he stands for a critical moment in history. His name soon came to stand in the Christian Church as a symbol of the hostile world: and just as the words "Christ" and the "Virgin Mary" in the Creed both recall a nation's discipline, the name of Pontius Pilate recalls a dramatic moment in the discipline of two great nations. For at the moment when Christ stood confronting Pilate, two nations were being judged, two processes of training confronted a crisis; first the training of Israel in *hope*, and next the training of Gentiledom, represented by Rome, in *justice*.

On the one hand, the people of Israel had been taught for many generations by their prophets the great truth that the development of history is presided over by a God who is through it working out His holy end. For the unfolding of that holy purpose the people had been taught to look, and they had been encouraged to connect its coming fulfillment with the appearance of one who should be their Anointed King, and who would

revive and transcend the glories of the Kingdom of David. Now when Jesus, after clearly teaching the principles and manifesting the beneficences of this Messianic Kingdom, had offered Himself as Messiah, the official heads of the nation definitely and formally not only rejected Him but clamoured for His crucifixion. "What!" said Pilate the governor, "shall I crucify your King?" Swiftly came the answer that announced the formal abandonment of the Messianic hope, "We have no King but Cæsar." With that formal announcement one period of Israel's discipline came to an end.

On the other hand, going on through the same centuries, had been the training both of Greece and Rome in the idea of justice: in the right interpretation of and obedience to the suggestions of conscience. By the rigidity and trustworthiness of its laws, no less than by military prowess, had been built up the greatness of the Roman name. But Rome had more than begun her decline. What was called the "Empire" had begun, at the Rubicon, in a flagrant and dishonour-

able breach of law : and beneath the thrones of the emperors lay the rottenness of usurpation and injustice and the substitution of names for realities. In the provinces of the Empire, the emperor's personal will was feared more than the inherent majesty of right. Pontius Pilate's treatment of Jesus of Nazareth brought out into a strong light this surrender of the very idea of the sanctity of right. "I find no fault in this man," he said. . . . "Then delivered he Jesus to be crucified." "Now," said Jesus referring to His own death, "is the judgment of this world." It was literally true. The death of Christ judged both Israel and Rome, showed both powers in the very act of renouncing the highest they knew, turning their back on the goal to which the Divine in their history had been pointing.

In the words "suffered under Pontius Pilate," there is thus not only an emphasis on the historic actuality of Christ's sufferings, but already a hint of the moral meaning of that death, of its historic function in the revelation of and judgment upon human sin,

in the form of the refusal of the divine discipline and the renunciation of divine ideals. The words are thus a reminder to the soul that turns in self-entrustment to God, of the magnitude of the forces that lead away from God and that blind men to their own highest interest.

Following upon this phrase and headed by it is a series of phrases emphasizing the central fact of Christ's death in a way which recalls the impressive detail with which that fact is related in the Gospel. "Suffered, was crucified, dead and buried He descended into Hell"—the words fall on the ear like the tolling of a funeral bell, and behind them we seem to hear the accents of the apostolic dismay that One like Jesus should die. The words reflect, too, not only that astonishment (which has its own religious value), but they reflect the strong impression in the early Church that Jesus' death was unique, unique in the fullness of its content. We do not understand, nor can we compass, the content of the whole experience called "death." We are, perhaps now more than

ever since Christ's time, unable to measure the depths of meaning in the awful word, and that indivisible experience, physical and moral, which it denotes. But whatever there is of suffering, humiliation, loss, horror, in that awful experience *Christ passed through*. It is this, I cannot but think, that is the chief significance of the presence of the words "and buried": and it is this, I believe, that in the main lay behind the addition in later times of the words "descended into hell." I do not for a moment believe that we need be distressed about these words, or that there is any advantage in fastidiously retranslating them. We know too little of the farther side of death to make such fastidiousness helpful or worthy. All that we know is that there is something in death which is not satisfied even by such words as "crucified, dead and buried." What that something is we do not know: but whatever that something is, the Church of Christ has been compelled to believe Jesus Christ has tasted it, and knows in His own experience the whole of that which haunts us as the dread, if anonymous, back-

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ground of death. "*It is CHRIST that died.*" The Creed spares no emphasis in reminding us that He on whom it invites us to place a confidence like that we give to God knows not only the heights of heaven, but all that is deeper than the deepest depths to which human experience can possibly reach.

It is most interesting to note that no word escapes the Creed hinting that all this was vicarious in design: no word attempts to construe the death as Salvation or Atonement. So in the classical passage in Philippians ii. describing our Lord's submission to death there is no expressed statement of vicarious design. And yet the suggestion is conveyed—I know not how unless it be just through placing first the description of the greatness of Christ's person—that this death is "for us men and for our Salvation," and therefore it is in place here to ask *why* this death should be so widely believed to have sacrificial and redemptive value. I think a sufficient answer may be given under these four heads:

(1) The death remains impressive re-

ligiously just because it is *Jesus'* death. Jesus stands not simply for purity but for unselfish love. His death is other than a murder or a suicide, or a problem of Providence : it is something to which He consents as part of a Divine purpose which He came to fulfill. Now He has so impressed us as built of love, and as living for ends of love, that we cannot but think of His death as having the ends of love to serve. And having got so far, we are led further by our instincts : by our haunting fear of death and our instinctive connecting of death with our moral position. We infer that He died to save us from death and from that which leads to death.

(2) Next, when this death has been regarded as a sacrifice for sin, made to secure that sin shall not hinder human peace and progress, it has borne certain fruits. It has brought men out of darkness into light, out of suspicion of God into joyous trust in Him, out of solitude into fellowship, out of the curse of guilt into lives of purity and power. And these changes have been the most important facts in the history of the world since Jesus came.

(3) Further, when so regarded, the death answers to our deepest experiences. "A shallow view of life," says Dora Greenwell, "rejects the Cross: but it is in accord with our deepest experiences." That witness is true. From the nature of the case, we are not able to give distinct articulation to the experiences which the Cross greets and touches: but deep answers to deep: a look of recognition passes between the inmost in us and the inmost meaning of the Cross which we can apprehend, though we cannot comprehend: can "see" and "feel" but cannot utter or explain.

(4) But principally we are drawn to the interpretation of Christ's death as sacrificial because of the conception of God which results from so regarding it. A very daring expression in the New Testament represents the Church as redeemed by the "blood of God." Into that compact and audacious metaphor is pressed a world of thought on the nature of the Cause, One and Eternal, which lies behind the things we see: and out of it proceeds an interpretation of life which

carries its own attestation with it. For if God is sacrificial love, then we may "conceive of life as love"; and there is no interpretation which at once answers to so many of the facts, and so directly ministers to the welfare of the morally highest in man. Of this, Calvary's Cross is, by the consent of all, the most eloquent historical symbol: and many of us are forced to believe by the evidence regarding the historical background and the personality of Jesus that the symbol is the work of a self-revealing God, who designs through it (for the symbol is not a picture only but an evil-piercing act) to "reconcile the world unto Himself." It is because Christ in His mission, person and experience gives me this conception of God as sacrificial love, and makes good His claim "to have come forth from God," and because in Him and through Him I see that God, it is because of this that with the same confidence with which I would throw myself into the hands of the Eternal Creator I entrust myself to Jesus Christ.

LECTURE IV
THROUGH DEATH TO GOD

The third day He rose again from the dead : He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty : from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead

LECTURE IV

THROUGH DEATH TO GOD

IN approaching the next section of the Creed, it is well to remind ourselves of the limitations of our study. We are looking upon the Creed as an expression of the confidence in God and in Christ of those who constituted the early Church. We are examining some of the grounds upon which these our forerunners in the Christian course yielded to Jesus Christ a trust like that which they gave to God. Part of these grounds of confidence lay in Christ's origin, personal bearing and career on earth, and in the impressions made by His death. We are now to see that part of the confidence arose out of a belief as to the issue of Christ's life : that "the third day He rose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty : from thence He shall come to judge the quick and

the dead." That is the Church's answer to the question arising very naturally and inevitably upon a contemplation of Christ's career : " What has become of Jesus ? "

The statements as they stand are extraordinarily difficult for the modern man. One recognizes of course that anybody who, having really died, could return again to life would become, if not an acknowledged authority upon religion, at least an object of acutest interest to men studying the riddle of the earth. But unhappily it is not easy for us to believe in the return to life of one really dead : still less is it easy for us to believe in a spectacular ascension into the sky and a visible return for the purpose of holding a General Assize. We must therefore approach these statements in the Creed with great care, and try rather to seize the central truth they mean to convey, than dwell upon indifferent detail. With regard to the Resurrection, we must first refresh our memory regarding the New Testament story. When we do this, we discover one or two interesting facts, of which we are apt to lose sight.

1. According to the Scriptural representation, the resurrection of Jesus was not a resuscitation of His dead body, but an emergence into a *new type and kind of life*,—human, but not up to that time seen in the world. “The resuscitation of Jesus, after having been three days in the grave, would have been a sufficiently astonishing thing, and difficult of belief. But the story would not have been without precedent.” The old Hebrew legends had told of men who had come back to life after a much longer period than three days in the tomb: and even in the memoirs of Jesus Himself there are stories of His bringing about such resuscitations. One of these cases was that of His friend Lazarus, whom He is stated to have revived after four days in the grave. Now that story may or may not be true: but the point to notice is that, either way, it is in no sense a parallel to the story of Christ’s “resurrection.” We are not, it is true, told much of Lazarus’ after life: but as far as the records go, there is nothing to show that he was in any essential respect different from what he had been be-

fore his gruesome adventure. He returned, apparently with the same powers and limitations, to the old life and to the old relationships and to the experience of decay and of a second "death." That is all that is ever alleged about Lazarus. But what is said about Jesus Himself is wholly different. The disciples are uniformly represented as being amazed and awed, not simply by the fact of His reappearance—He had Himself repeatedly foretold to them that after three days He would reappear,—but by the *manner* of His reappearance. He came to them in bodily form, in a body bearing the marks of His crucifixion, yet altered utterly. For one thing, the body possessed new and unheard-of powers, or rather was independent, in a new and unheard-of way, of earthly limitations. It passes through closed doors: it is found present rather than arrives: it vanishes rather than disappears.¹ Again, the Risen One is apparently not easily recognized: His recognition by others would appear to be either the work of His will or (what is perhaps only an-

¹ See Westcott, "The Revelation of the Risen Lord," p. 8.

other aspect of the same thing) the result of spiritual affinity and love on the part of His friends. And yet again, the old relationships are not resumed. The Risen One is an occasional visitant, not an abiding companion. He "refuses the caress of affection, inviting only the touch of an enquiring faith." Yet He is no ghost: He eats before His friends, if not with them. He does not however eat as guest, but as host: and as something more and higher than a human host. His affections and interests have most patently survived,—He is quite obviously *the same person*: yet He is clothed upon by new functions and powers, and the final issue of it all is not so much a departure as an intimate abiding among men: "Lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world."

"It is foolishness to deal with a story like this as if it were, what precisely it is not, an alleged case of return from death to what we call *life*. The *differentia* of the story from all others is that it is a revelation of a new type and kind of life; a life human in its interests and affinities, yet superhuman in its

powers and issues. Here is 'a new fact, added to the sum of human experience': a new creation: a revelation of the possibilities of human life."¹

2. Now this higher type of human life is congruous with what we know of the person and character of Jesus. The impression that is made upon the unprejudiced mind, as it contemplates the figure of Jesus in the evangelic story, is not so much that of a sinless person, as of a person too great for His human environment, belonging to and tending towards a larger, higher life: yet so devoted to mankind that we cannot think of that higher sphere to which He belonged as having itself no relation to human hope. He loved men intensely and longed to "save" them: and at least once His love is represented as taking the form of a desire to escape, even by death, the limitations which prevented His love from reaching more than a small body of men.² An emergence into a higher human state would be absolutely congruous with this feature

¹ "The Universality of Jesus," pp. 162 ff. ² John xvii, 1, 2.

of Christ's character. Again, as we have already seen, Jesus impresses us by His intimacy with God. He carried Himself towards God as only a son could. And yet the religious life of Jesus strikes us as having an element of the wistful about it: perhaps one should rather say of the promiscuous. It does not impress us as having reached its final stage of fulfillment and joy. Death as the issue of it is inconceivable: friendship like that of Jesus with God cannot end in death. But equally inconceivable is a mere continuing in, or return to "life" as we know it with its turbulent changes, its bafflements, its disappointment. *Only a higher human life lived in God* and vested with Divine powers would be an appropriate issue for such a life of prayerful confidence in God as Jesus lived.

3. The third fact about the Resurrection, which we find in the Scriptural representations, is the subordination of the spectacular aspect of it to its moral significance. No one is alleged to have seen Jesus rise: we possess no attempt at a description of the Resurrection. What is given us is an account of

what was visible in His tomb three days after His death, together with a series of incidents of His alleged appearance to His friends : and beyond that a body of interpretation of the Resurrection (in the speeches and writings of the apostles) which shows it entangled with our moral life, its hopes and aspirations. It is probably in the interest of this moral significance of the Resurrection that the evidence for the physical miracle is left where it is. "If," says Henry Latham,¹ "the fact of our Lord's Resurrection had been so attested that no sane person could doubt of the fact, . . . its moral significance would be impaired : for the acceptance of it would be independent of what is essential to religious belief, viz., the concurrence of the free human will." Be this as it may, it is deeply interesting to observe that the Resurrection in the New Testament moves strictly within the circle of faith. No unbelieving person saw Jesus risen, so far as we know. The last thing that the unbelieving world saw of Jesus was His inert corpse hanging on the Cross, and He has never

¹ Latham, "Pastor Pastorum," p. 444.

made Himself visible to the unbelieving world since. On the other hand, the meaning of the Resurrection for the life of faith, and especially for the stimulation of confidence in God, is set forth in a great variety of ways by the apostles. I can here do no more than refer to some of the "uses" to which the Resurrection is thus put in the service of faith.

First of all, the Resurrection assures us that it is worth while to be good: that goodness and life go together. Even if goodness involves sacrifice, sacrifice unto death, it is in the end vindicated: the trust in the law of life which lies behind the venture is justified. Jesus is Himself thus represented as justified and crowned: and with His vindication goes the vindication of God. For had Jesus remained deprived of life, it would no longer be possible for us to believe in a goodness-rewarding God. The behaviour of Jesus was, if one may boldly use the word, a challenge to the fairness of God: the Resurrection meets the challenge triumphantly. We can now believe in God, whatever loss or

suffering here our adherence to righteousness involves. The issue of obedience here is not a narrower life, still less death : *it is emergence into greater fullness of life.* For the resurrection of Jesus with its revelation of a new kind and type of human life is much more than a proof of "immortality" : it is the assurance that we have but tasted the beginnings of life here, that there is a higher and deeper life beyond and that the "life abundant" is the reward of loyalty to the morally highest. The contrast of this to the shadowy expectations of the future which were all that the human imagination had reached to before Christ's Resurrection we shall see more clearly when we come to speak of the resurrection of the body. It is enough here to recall in this general way the fact that the Resurrection in the New Testament moves and operates only in the region of faith and in alliance with clean and holy intentions and aspirations. It is this fact which continues to draw to it the attention of men who care for religion, and which accounts for its place in the Apostles' Creed.

When we read the sentence "He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty," and turn to the New Testament for their Scriptural warrant we find again that which impresses us about the Scriptural account of the Resurrection,—that the spectacular is subordinated to the moral. The Epistles of St. Paul are full of the idea of the exaltation of Jesus in the spiritual sphere and of His permanent connection with human religion : but they do not say anything about the spectacle of the Ascension. And the same reticence really characterizes the Gospels. The references in Mark and Luke are either very brief or of more than doubtful authenticity : Matthew and John omit the Ascension altogether.

This is distinctly a relief to the mind of a twentieth century man, who frankly can make little use of the story of a visible levitation, and who if pressed hard may have severe things to say as to its credibility. If he can keep a corner of his mind open to possible acceptance of the story, it can only be on the understanding that he is allowed

to think of the spectacular occurrence as an educational necessity : that is to say, that it should have been a device of the Supreme who condescends to childlike means to conduct men's sluggish minds to spiritual realities.

But what in the case of the Ascension are these spiritual realities? What conceptions are, in the New Testament, associated with the rising of Christ to the "right hand" of God?

1. The Ascension is taken as a symbol of the completeness of Christ's triumph over the tragedy of human life. Sometimes that triumph is represented as rest : sometimes as "glorification," which must mean extension of faculty and of opportunity : but always as joy, and resumption of power. Thus as the burial and descent into hell give added emphasis to the fact of His death, so the Ascension adds emphasis to the Resurrection, and is by itself a vivid symbol of the triumphant issue of the life that gives itself to redemptive service.

2. But this joy is not thought of as se-

cured by detachment from human interests. Christ is represented as ascending to the fount of power, but not for Himself. By the aid of the imagery of the priesthood, He is represented (very especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Revelation) as now the Chief Minister of man in things spiritual, —carrying on a ministry at once intercessory and benedictive.

This, it has to be noted, is really the most credible suggestion in the field as to what has become of Jesus. It is positively easier to believe that He is to-day in the spiritual world having intercessory access to the Source of Good, and from that Source "giving gifts unto men," than to believe that He has received no more abundant life, or to believe that He is extinct. And the suggestion that to-day He serves humanity in spiritual matters distinctly fortifies our confidence in Him. If He were represented as now above and beyond the turmoil of human need, there would be about the climax of His story the *taint of withdrawal*: and we could not possibly commit ourselves to one who does not

absolutely and for all time commit Himself to us. But when we are told that He has been clothed with power just [that He may, though unseen, be our minister and friend, we are told something which greatly encourages us in the act of self-committal: for the suggestion is breaking upon us that we have, in Christ, to do with One who, though His historical and visible self-manifestation took place far away and long ago, is not now "very far from any one of us": He has passed into the sphere of the spiritual, that is, the *sphere of the intimately near*; and we are being prepared to fill with meaning and with a certain human and affectionate interest the next "article" in the Creed which bids us say "I entrust myself to a God intimate and near"—"I believe in the Holy Ghost."

But meanwhile, the Creed tells us that Christ "will come from the right hand of God to judge the quick and the dead." This is the only article of the Creed (with the doubtful exception of the phrase about the resurrection of the body) which commits

itself to a definite prediction of a future event upon earth ; and it is interesting that there is no article in the Creed which at this moment means less to, or weighs less with, the vast majority of Christian people. Were it not for the fact that the belief in Christ's return to judge receives mysterious supports from certain very deep instincts and premonitions of judgment within us, it is possible that the belief would fade out of practical use altogether.

It need hardly be said that in this inability to make use of the hope of Christ's return to judge, the modern Christian is in sharp contrast to the Christian of the first century. To the early Christian faith in the Second Advent was vivid, and glowing, and every moment of delay in that coming was measured with wistful eyes. Browning has caught that wistful misgiving in the famous lines in "A Death in the Desert" :

" Nay, should His coming be delayed a while
Say ten years longer : twelve years, some compute."

This drastic telescoping of history and so

very near expectation of the end undoubtedly took its origin in certain predictions made by Jesus Himself. Jesus appears to have been always conscious of the disproportion between Himself and His environment, and was apparently always aware of possessing enormous reserves of life and power and "glory": and He persistently declared that He was showing but a fringe of the power vested in Him, and would return clothed with power and "glory." These predictions are the agony of the modern student of the gospels, but they were frankly accepted by the early Church. To the first disciples it seemed not only reasonable, but necessary that the Lord should soon return. They felt themselves in possession, through Jesus, of a gospel sure to overturn the very foundations of society; they felt themselves at the threshold of a new era and they could not see to the end. The changes which were imminent, the confusion and the turmoil He must Himself come to quiet and control.

In the form in which it was cherished, the expectation was disappointed: and the ques-

tion now is,—was the whole idea a mistake? Was Jesus Himself deceived? Is the world to see no more of Him than it has seen? Can *we* of this late day still hope and believe that “He will come to judge”?

Now what the plain man, reading his New Testament, sees in Christ’s words about the future is, in part, something which is obviously being fulfilled in the world, viz., that Christ’s judgment of men is becoming ever more wide-spread and penetrates ever more keenly and deeply into human life as He Himself comes to be better understood by men. The spiritual movements through which He becomes better known are real “comings” of Christ to men. So far, all is straightforward and obvious. Further, the plain man can see that when this process has had its perfect work, and human life everywhere has been subjected to the “searching” of the spirit of Christ, Christ Himself will then stand unveiled.

What remains obscure in the New Testament representation affects the manner and the time of the final dénouement,—not

the fact that such dénouement will take place.

When men have given way to idleness, to cowardly fatigue in the battle against evil, or to an unregulated and impatient curiosity, it is then that they have lost themselves in speculation about the manner and the date of the completion of Christ's progressive self-manifestation to the world, and refuse to be content not to know that which on earth was evidently hidden from the Lord Himself.

But the *fact*—that He is coming, ever coming, and one day openly, finally and fully coming to judge the world—ought to be to us as it was to the first Christians, a steadying solace, and a joy. Slowly but steadily, His ideals make way in the world: characters which do not conform to His mind, though they may make for a time a dazzling display, yet surely in the end fade out of human regard, and glide from glory to contempt: if judgment mean in part exposure, then most assuredly the exposure is taking place in modern life, at both ends of the world, of all that opposes itself to His will: and within the

loud self-confidence of His foes are being made evident interstices of misgiving, and the "fear of Christ" grows apace. In all this, those who are near to Him rejoice: it deepens the trust with which they put themselves into His hands: and while they resolutely put from them the speculations of a prying curiosity, their spirit nevertheless

" . . . yearns for the sight, O Christ, of Thy fulfilling,
Faints for the flaming of Thine advent feet."

LECTURE V
THE INTIMATE GOD

I believe in the Holy Ghost

LECTURE V

THE INTIMATE GOD

I SUPPOSE there is no article of the evangelical faith that has given rise to more conflicting emotions than this, with which at one time the Creed of the Church terminated : "I believe in the Holy Ghost."

To some persons, emancipated from the tyranny of the theological formulas and rejoicing in the spiritual action of God in His world, it is a soul-rallying delight to say, "I believe in the Holy Ghost." To others, the merest reference to the Holy Spirit is bewildering and irritating, and the irritation, it should be boldly said, is intensified by the unctuous way in which certain devotees of the sanctified life seem to annex the Holy Spirit as a special deity of their own particular school of devotion, implying that whosoever fails to render to Him homage upon certain appointed lines is an unenlightened, if not unregenerate, outsider.

Others again are bewildered theologically. The conception of a Spirit of God who is a Person distinct from Father and from Son is not an easy one to grasp, and many, in their heart of hearts, do not know what to do with this third Divine Person, who is not flesh and blood as Jesus is, nor yet is the Father—but is felt to be a vapourized remainder of Deity. And the bewilderment is increased, when, in the name of orthodoxy, we are told that we must think of Him as Person and not “merely an influence.” For of what use is He to us as Person, if He does not exercise upon us an influence? And what better name than influence can be found for that gentle pressure by a stronger upon a weaker personality, by the restraint of which the stronger personality indicates his reverence for the freedom of the weaker? Is it any wonder that many in whom such questionings as these are surging are perplexed?

Once more, to others, and especially in connection with the sense of personal unworthiness, the suggestion of the presence and pressure of the Spirit of God is full of

terror. "There is a sin against the Holy Ghost which cannot be forgiven : what if I have committed it?" Along the road of that haunting fear, what saddened souls have trudged !

These, then, are some of the varied emotions and tempers which have related themselves to this article of the Creed : joy, exultation, comfort—perplexity, bewilderment, irritation and despair. The catholic spirit and disposition of our Lord on the one hand ; upon the other, unholy pride, sectarian prejudice, parochial narrowness.

It is notorious that these difficulties cannot be dissolved by an appeal to the letter of Holy Scripture. The language of the New Testament on the subject presents certain verbal discrepancies which need terrify no lover of his Bible, but which prevent us from being literalists here. Thus in St. John the Lord Jesus expressly speaks of the Holy Spirit as distinct from Himself : the Spirit, He says, is "another Comforter." Yet St. Paul quite as expressly identifies the Lord with the Spirit : "Now the Lord is the Spirit." Again,

the phrase "the Holy Spirit" quite obviously often refers to God Himself the Eternal : yet St. John (vii. 39) says, " [There was] not yet [a Spirit], because Jesus was not yet glorified," and the "Spirit" often stands not for God, but for God's gifts, and is said to be "ministered."

And yet there is no more distinctive truth in the Christian religion than its doctrine of the Holy Spirit. I have seen it stated on the very high authority of eminent scholars that it is in this doctrine more than in anything else that the genuine "differentia" of Christianity lies. How then shall we try to grasp it?

Every doctrine of the Christian religion is really the answer to some cry of the human heart. The Bible doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the Bible's answer to a certain cry of the human spirit which finds expression in questions like these: What or who is this conscience within me who rebukes me when I sin, and cannot therefore be actually the sinning self? Can a man ever be quite alone,

in a really impenetrable solitude? Are the phenomena of conscience to be interpreted in terms of one personality or of two? Is there a *real* Other when I pray, to whom I pray and who inspires my prayer; or is what I call prayer just "communion with my own subliminal consciousness which I do not recognize as my own," and which I project into a fancied exteriority as another person? Are we now passing through a tract of the Divine activity, or are we to believe in a God who once, long ago, and in Palestine, was much more active than He is now?

Questions like these are ever rising in men's minds; and the Bible, while to our eyes single verses may appear to be mutually contradictory when we look at them with narrow literalist eyes, answers in no uncertain way. Everywhere, it says in effect, life is undergirt and penetrated by the living God. Let us take a few illustrations of this point of view.

To begin with, the Bible declares that what we call *nature* is the fruit of the action of the Spirit of God: and that what we call

“dead matter” has “within it the action and before it the purposes” of a Holy God.

We need not be reminded how this agrees with quite recent findings, or rather impressions, of scientific students of nature. There is no such thing, they tell us, as really dead matter. When we “raise the stone” and “cleave the wood,” we find—God. And men are coming dimly to see that nature (which even the old Romans felt was something that is “about to be born”) has before it new forms and higher development. This the Bible consistently teaches: there is to be a new heaven and a new earth, but its coming, like the coming into being of the first earth, waits on the action of the Spirit of God.

The *physical* life of *man* is similarly traced to the Spirit of God. “God breathed into man the breath of life.” And *if* these bodies of ours, which under one aspect are so obviously designed for dissolution, and yet in a deeper sense are part of ourselves, have any future of higher development before them; if, in other words, life is to hold more than we have experienced here—and we know it *can*

hold more—that prospect waits on the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit that “shall quicken . . . your mortal bodies.”

The *intellectual* life of man, again, is represented as depending on the stimulus of the Divine Spirit, and that, whether one thinks of art, or science, or philosophic thought, or such things as moral education or the administration of justice. Every one remembers the classical example of Bezaleel, the craftsman who was “filled . . . with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship.”¹ Here is a most profound thought, fitted to change the face of the world: that artistic workmanship has behind it the Spirit of God: that the beautiful arrangement and manipulation of those materials in nature which God has set out in a designed disorder—a chaos, with a sug-

¹ Exodus xxxi. 1-5.

gestion of order at its heart—that this work has within it the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit of God then broods over the world of order-creating labour, whether in sale-room, kitchen, factory, or scientific laboratory.

We need in our day consciously to *extend* to the Bible limit the area over which we think of God's Spirit as acting. In the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, the Spirit of God is promised to endow the "Branch" from "the stem of Jesse" so that He may rightly administer justice. This connection of the Spirit of God with the administration of civil law brings Him into a sphere which we far too hastily place outside religion. Yet we shall never see our people manifesting the highest type of citizenship until they learn to reverence all honest and beneficent legislation as *not man's work but God's*. When the Lord Jesus was challenged because He claimed identification with God, He quoted an old psalm in which the poet had declared that magistrates officially stood in the place of God to the people; and even when they

were corrupt, yet officially they were "gods." Why? Because in the laws they handled, part, at least, of the holy mind of God was mediated to men: the "word of God came to them." And the Lord's own claim is that if such persons were rightly called gods, whose limited function was that of administering a fragment of the Divine mind, it was absurd to charge with blasphemy a Man in whom the whole of that Divine mind was very obviously incarnated if He said, "I am the Son of God." (See John x. 34-36.)

Thus so far we have seen that the active life on the earth, *outside the field of what we usually specify as religion*, is in the Bible declared to have within it the action of the Spirit of God.

Of course, when you rise to the moral and spiritual life of man, the Bible voice is uniform in positing here the gracious Spirit, as Fount and Support. Even Jesus Himself, who is Man as God designed man to be, is represented as having behind and within Him the action of the Divine Spirit. The very beginnings of His life are a thought of

God : He is "conceived by the Holy Ghost." When He registers Himself a servant of humanity, and is baptized, the Holy Spirit descends on Him. His moral discipline by temptation is under the direction of the Divine Spirit. By the same Spirit He does His marvellous works and through the Eternal Spirit He makes His final sacrifice. Thus the life of man as God meant man to be is represented as permeated by the action of the Spirit of God.

And, one need hardly add, the life which proceeded directly from the Christ, the new fellowship of the Christian Church, is represented as pervaded by the action of the same Spirit. Not that that Spirit does not work in individuals and in fellowships outside Christendom. But within Christendom where Christ is known, the action of the Spirit of God is necessarily more swift, more adequate, more thoroughgoing, because "Jesus" is all the Spirit has anywhere to suggest, and by—so to speak—a gesture of suggestion, He can, where Jesus is known, gather up all His persuasions :

while outside, they must be scattered in many ways. The very design of missionary work is that we who know the Lord Jesus should go out into the twilight of heathenness where the Holy Spirit has been at work under hampering conditions, and not deny that work, but assist it, and call out into Christ's marvellous light the fraternities of the Holy Spirit who without the knowledge of Jesus abide in a yearning darkness.¹

Here then is the Bible view of the Spirit of God. Within and behind every manifestation of life is the Life that from all eternity was with the Father. In nature, in man, in man's physical, intellectual, spiritual life, everywhere is the self-inthrusting, "immanent," ministrant Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit *is* this presently ministrant and pursuing God. And we need His ministry

¹ In all this, I designedly avoid any straining after theological exactitude. The Bible language is on this matter flexible, bending itself to our apprehension who have room for only one emphasis at a time in our minds. Any formal separation of Christ from or identification of Him with the Spirit has but little value for many of our contemporaries: it is enough if they may be sure that Jesus is within all spiritual stir in the world.

constantly. Why? To begin with, we have no moral initiative. Further, we have no steady eye for moral and spiritual beauty. The good work needs to be begun and sustained within us by Another steadier than we.

Next, I feel that what God wants of me is not single and isolated acts of obedience, but a temper and spirit of obedience. And to produce this in me I need the constant inhabiting of my spirit by the Divine Spirit. If my obedience could be just a succession of acts, the appropriate God might be one whom I knew in history only; but there is a timeless, abiding element necessary in my obedience, and I need that element in my God.

Now the Creed says, "I believe in the Holy Ghost." We have agreed to take the word "believe in" as meaning "entrust myself to." What can be the special value of an act of self-entrustment specifically to God as Spirit? It means committing oneself to the Divine companionship: it means resolving always to welcome the God who is

urgently near: it means resolving to abandon self-dependence and at every hour acknowledge myself debtor to Him whose voice is within my voice, whose thought is within my thought, whose strength is within my strength. It means surrender to spiritual ideals of life; it means committing oneself to a holy optimism; it means determination to recognize the essential brotherhood of all men who share the disposition which the Divine Spirit fashions in men.

I believe if I perform from time to time this act of self-committal, I may look for the growth of three results:

(1) First, surely there will grow in me a tenderness to human life everywhere, because I see in it the residence of Deity. Surely I shall be careful for the spiritual welfare of those around me, within whom is the action, and before whom are the purposes, of the Holy Ghost.

(2) Next, surely I shall grow in appreciation of what I can only call the *cost* at which this marvellous ministry is being maintained. I welcome the recent emphasis on God's

immanence, if only men keep in mind that it is costly immanence; that God cannot keep Himself so near to sin and suffering as this spiritual ministry requires, without *suffering*: a suffering which is the perpetual cross in the heart of God. If my sympathy with God's pain thus grows, I shall never surely allow aught but the Cross of Jesus—the terrestrial expression of the Innermost in God—to be the centre of my religion.

(3) And yet, surely if the God who lives to save be as near as all this implies, my heart will learn to sing with joy!¹ “Joy in the Holy Ghost!” Why not? “The Holy Spirit,” said Tertullian, “is a glad spirit.” Sheer gladness that God, panoplied to save, had come, leaped in the hearts of the first Christians and was the secret of their conquest of the world.² And “joy in the Holy

¹ “The joy of religion resides in the knowledge, love, adoration of One truly distinct from, whilst immensely penetrative of ourselves.”—Baron F. v. Hügel.

² “Augustine was attracted to the church because he saw it *non dissolute hilaris*.”—T. R. Glover, “Conflict of Religions in the Roman Empire,” p. 166. We must however be careful to give full value to the “non-dissolute.” We must carefully distinguish between the gladness of the Holy Ghost and thought-

Ghost " is the secret of victorious Christian service still. Who will minister to us this Joy?

Father Faber, when he had finished his book called "Growth in Holiness," wrote out this beautiful Dedication :

To
My Blessed Prince and Patron
Raphael,
one of the seven
who stand alway before God
glorious, benignant, beautiful
the figure of His Providence
physician, guide, and joy of souls
companion of wayfaring mortals
and angel of their vicissitudes
by whom
the tenderness of the Father
the healing of the Son
and
THE GLADNESS OF THE HOLY GHOST
are ministered
to wandering men
with the efficacious power
of an angelic spirit
and the compassionate pathetic love
of a kindly human heart

less hilarity. It is the joy that comes not of ignoring but of overcoming life's cares and fears. It is not happiness so much as blessedness : "There is in man," said Carlyle, "a higher than love of happiness ; he can do without happiness and instead thereof find blessedness." Such blessedness is the characteristic fruit of the Spirit.

It is very beautiful, and there is a true Christian instinct within the words, "The Gladness of the Holy Ghost." But why should Faber think that an angelic creature is needed to mediate with power angelic and sympathy tender and human this holy boon? Nay! The very glory of our faith is that this ministration is the undelegated work of God Himself, who, while He is ever an infinity of height above us, yet comes "closer" to us "than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet." It is in its presentation to us, as the Sole Object of our trust, of a Christlike God both infinitely high and intimately near, that the Christian faith stands utterly alone in its answer to the cry of the human heart.

LECTURE VI
GOD'S SOCIAL ORDER

. . . The Holy Catholic Church:
the communion of saints

LECTURE VI

GOD'S SOCIAL ORDER

MANY devout souls have been shocked by the abrupt introduction into the Creed of the ecclesiastical interest suggested by the phrase "The Holy Catholic Church." The phrase seems to turn a directory of personal religion into an oath of allegiance to an institution, and one seems to be committing oneself to dangerous positions and to abandonment of one's freedom, as one repeats the phrase which so irrelevantly attaches itself to the expression of one's personal trust in God.

And in our time many feel this shock with special force, because they frankly do *not* believe in the Church, and they feel that the interest of their personal religious integrity demands that they keep themselves free from entanglement in its claims.

It is important therefore that we be quite clear as to the sense in which we can take the sentence "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church."

To begin with, there can here be no longer any question of the use of the word "believe" in the sense of "I entrust myself to." That meaning can be used only when the Object of faith is at least personal. With the words "the Holy Ghost," then, that idea of "self-entrustment," which in these studies we have assumed as binding the main body of the Creed together, must be set aside : and the sentence "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church" must be taken to mean "I believe that there *is* a Holy Catholic Church."

Bishop Westcott frankly takes this position, and even links together the two meanings of the word "believe." "Because we *believe in* the Holy Ghost, because we throw ourselves with complete trust upon the efficacy of His divine influence, of His invisible Presence, we *believe that there is* a society in which it finds embodiment." "We do not say, you will observe, that we believe in it as we

believe in the Persons of the Godhead. We do not say that we believe it as speaking with a clear authoritative voice. We say that we believe in the reality of its existence : we believe, in spite of all appearances, that it *is*."

It is obvious however that if we take this position, the "Catholic Church" will be for us something other than any institution, or the sum of the institutions, which we *see*. "We see," Bishop Westcott goes on, "the many separate churches : we mourn over the grievous failures and sins of Christians, over our own failures and sins : we acknowledge in this communion and in that the declaration and the power of some part of the universal Gospel. All this is matter of experience, of sight. But beyond this separation, this imperfection, this fragmentariness, we believe, though we cannot see, that there is a Church, one, holy, Catholic, the body of Christ, through which He is slowly revealing Himself in many parts and advancing to a complete sovereignty in the world."

It is of course open to grave dispute whether a conception of the Church like this was

before the minds of the framers of the Creed. To them, it is very probable, the distinction which Bishop Westcott makes would have had little meaning. They knew of one body of conviction, aspiration and fellowship scattered throughout parts of the world, yet everywhere infilled with one common life, and sharply distinguished in opinion and conduct from the pagan world outside. This body was for them the Catholic Church: and just how far it was "institutionalized" depends on questions of the date of the admission of this article into the Creed, and of the signification at different periods of the Church's history of the word "Catholic": questions which we do not here discuss.

For our practical question is "How can *we* understand and employ the term Catholic?" And there is no sort of doubt that the answer is provided in the quotation from Bishop Westcott. We must learn to distinguish between the Church we see, and the Church in which we believe. This is hard for many of us, on whose minds the Institution with its denominations and sects lies like an incubus:

we cannot easily throw off the thought of that organized Ecclesiastical Institution, and in its place make a home in our mind for the conception of a world-wide, international and interracial community of faith owning one common life in God.

This wider community is not a mere "Church Invisible": part of its life is not only visible, but is at the very forefront of the world's progress. It is not the community, but its frontiers, that we cannot see. It includes many who have been and are within the ecclesiastical institutions, and many who never entered their fellowship: while from it are excluded all those who, whatever be their links with the ecclesiastical institutions, have nevertheless neither part nor lot in the Church's warfare and the Church's hope.

To believe that this Church exists is surely not difficult; especially in our day, when the essential oneness of many forms of religious experience hitherto deemed mutually exclusive is coming to be widely recognized. To believe that it is Holy, is to believe that despite all corrupt accompaniments of the or-

ganization of religion in the world, there is that in the religious life of man which contains the promise and potency of life unstained ; to believe that it is Catholic, is to believe that despite all present Sunderings of races and nations, the knowledge of God will, like secular knowledge, become internationally one, and though men will continue to differ on non-essentials, they will approach ever nearer to a common understanding as to the meaning of life, and as to the ideals which should govern conduct.

It will be seen that belief of this sort does not involve any blinding of oneself to the patent facts regarding the present condition of the institutions into which part of this wide-spread fellowship has gathered itself. The institutions are man-made, and in their present form are extremely unlikely to endure : but *the Church* is indestructible. The Churches we see are many : the Church we believe in is one. The Churches we see are corrupt : the Church we believe in is holy. The Churches we see are provincial and sectarian : the Church we believe in is Catholic.

This does not mean that we are wise in despising or turning from the institutions as we see them. There have been times when good men have been compelled to abandon them : yet such abandonments have meant in the end only the forming of rival organizations and the laying up in consequence of more trouble for succeeding generations.

There is in our time a wide-spread and increasing tendency to regret the violence with which our fathers sometimes made haste to abandon institutions that were unsatisfactory and to begin *de novo* : and it is doubtful whether the fever of organized secession will in the near future, at least, afflict any considerable body of sensible men. Rather is it in keeping with the tolerant (perhaps the semi-indifferent) temper of the time to be patient with existing institutions, and from within to work for the evolution of a pure and more efficient organization for the expression of the religious spirit.

But if we are to do this, we must, as I have

said, familiarize ourselves with and try to make others appreciate the conception of the Church Universal. Look at the conception for a moment historically.

In Israel, in Old Testament times, up to a certain point the Church and the State were the same thing, two aspects of the same Institution: and the idea of a community of faith not absolutely identified in outline with racial or national limits seems to have been practically unthought of until the time of Isaiah. Isaiah conceived the idea of segregating a small group that it might be, within the State, an inner circle of fellowship and faith.¹ His idea seems to have been to gather around his own family a circle of friends who would study the mind of God; who would in a time of the wide-spread neglect of true worship maintain the practice of devotion; and who would further be a sacrament of hope,—their faith the pledge that God, despite the indifference of His people, would yet fulfill His will. This movement is expressly declared by great scholars to have

¹ See Isaiah viii. 16-18.

been the actual beginning of the Church.¹ The Church however was still a little state within the State: it was not in communion with anything outside the national borders. The idea of an *international* community of faith, possessing one common life, frontierless, defying all human distinctions and limitations, even that of death itself,—this great idea is unique, and is the creation of the mind of Jesus Christ.

Observe the phrase an “international community of faith.” This is something more and other than the Brotherhood of man. The world of Christ’s time was not without at least speculative anticipations of some sort of brotherhood or cosmopolitan fellow-citizenship: philosophy looked for the time when men the world over should become “one flock obeying one law.” But this is by no means the idea of our Lord. He contemplated something more than a vast comradeship or body of good-will: He planned

¹ See Wellhausen, “History of Israel,” p. 485. Robertson Smith, “The Prophets of Israel,” pp. 274, 275. G. A. Smith, “The Book of Isaiah,” p. 126.

a family of God, owning one common life in Himself, each member performing his appointed task in bringing to fulfillment God's holy purposes, disciplined by his personal relation as a forgiven child to the redeeming God. The idea of the Church then is not the idea of good-will alone, even on international areas ; but of *good-will interwoven with discipline* ; and it is more than questionable whether the dream of a universal human brotherhood can ever be realized unless the idea of such discipline as is involved in personal contrite surrender to God is as prominent in the conception as the idea of genial good fellowship.¹

It is astonishing to observe how soon and how firmly this great conception laid hold of the imagination of the apostolic circle. It is extremely prominent in the later work of St. Paul, and seems to have been his chief encouragement. When shut off by his imprisonment from many cherished activities, he seems to have refreshed his mind by the

¹ See an interesting application of this idea in Gore, " International Review of Missions," Vol. I, p. 278.

thought that Christ had planted in the earth a community which one day would grow to be a million-faceted reflector of His glory. Paul saw that Church, one, Holy, Universal, the "body of Christ," the agent through which Christ was to be made fully manifest in the earth, its common life permeating all nations,—saw all this at a time when the actual Christian groups—the "institutions"—were little scattered companies mainly in Asia Minor and Southeastern Europe, groups extremely ill-developed in many aspects of morality, exhibiting many human weaknesses, and wearing out his own apostolic heart by their frequent surrenders to these weaknesses. So sure was he of the quality of the life that throbbed in these as yet so raw and untrained aggregations of human souls, that he saw in them, taken as one, the promise of a collective counterpart of Christ Himself. He speaks of the Church as "the fullness of Him who all in all is being fulfilled." There is a sense, that is to say, in which both Christ's work and He Himself were incomplete when He left this world, and the Church

is the completion of the Christ, "the extension of the Incarnation," its very sufferings completing the sufferings of its Lord.

This apostolic enthusiasm is reflected in Paul's great interpreter, John, and in writers of the subapostolic period. The interest of St. Ignatius in the preservation in harmony and peace of the one life within the Church is witnessed by many an earnest appeal in his winsome, wistful Epistles; and possibly the very earliest extant use of the phrase the "Catholic Church" is in his truly Catholic sentence, "Wherever Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church."¹

In the deeply interesting Visions in the book called "The Shepherd of Hermas," a book "found in general circulation in the Eastern and Western Churches soon after the middle of the second century,"² there is quite startling evidence of the place which the Church universal held in the Christian imagination of the period. Hermas tells us how, when moved to self-examination, he saw

¹ Ignatius, "Epistle to the Smyrnæans," VIII.

² Lightfoot.

not once but often a vision of the Church. "While I was advising and discussing these matters in my heart, I saw before me a great chair of snow-white wool: and there came an aged lady in glistening raiment, having a book in her hand, and she sat down alone, and saluted me, 'Good-morrow, Hermas.'" . . . "A youth said to me, 'Whom thinkest thou the aged woman to be?' I say, 'The Sibyl.' 'Thou art wrong,' saith he. 'Who then is she?' I say. 'The Church,' saith he. I said unto him, 'Wherefore then is she aged?' 'Because,' saith he, 'she was created before all things: therefore is she aged: and for her sake the world was framed.'" . . . "Now she was seen of me, in my first vision of last year, as a very aged woman, and seated on a chair. In the second vision her face was youthful but her flesh and her hair were aged, and she spoke to me standing: and she was more gladsome than before. But in the third vision she was altogether youthful and of exceeding great beauty, and her hair alone was aged: and she was gladsome exceedingly and seated on

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a couch." ¹ This progressive rejuvenescence is explained by a reference to the renewals of hope and joy which the members of the Church who truly repent experience, which renewals constitute the very life of the Church itself. A little reflection upon a passage like this will help us to realize how precious to the early Christians was their belief in the Church universal, how sure they were of the vast potencies contained within that life which throbbed in every Christian group.

I wish we could recover this clear vision of one Church, holy, universal. Alas! we know what it was which early dimmed the vision. As long as the early Christian communities were in life and conduct abruptly distinct from paganism, there was probably little harm in identifying the Church Catholic with the sum of the members of the Christian groups. But as the Church became more institutional and less holy, it grew to be a serious matter that her visible frontiers should be thought of as the actual frontiers of the holy Church of Jesus. But this is

¹ I have here placed together extracts from Visions 1, 2 and 3.

exactly what happened. People began to believe in and lean upon the institution whose outlines they could *see*, in precisely the sense which the Apostles' Creed deprecates. And as the Institution grew in worldly obviousness and strength, the organized Church came to be more and more an object of trust, a kind of Mother upon whose bosom one could lean, on whose offices one might depend for salvation.

At the Reformation the distinction between the Church Institutional and the Church Frontierless was to some extent revived, though it is to be regretted that the terms used were the "Church Visible" and the "Church Invisible." It is greatly to be desired that we should recover that clear apprehension of the idea of the Church Catholic, which made a reformer like Calvin say, "Outside the Church there is no salvation." What he meant was that outside that frontierless body, the one body aspiring towards the life of Jesus Christ, there is no salvation; the full meaning of the word salvation is to be realized only in Christian fellowship,

even though it be true that a man is justified alone.

But the tendency of Protestantism has been to draw away from the idea of the "invisible" Church: the old institutional idea has been revived, until now we have the deplorable spectacle of many little parochial sects excluding outsiders from communion, and behaving as though they regarded themselves as the sole organization on earth of the Holy Catholic Church of Jesus Christ. Thank God, these assumptions, with the provincialism which makes them possible, are becoming more and more intolerable or rather ludicrous to sensible men to-day: for upon ever wider areas, the Spirit of God has been teaching us our need of one another; and as Jesus Christ is "being fulfilled," that is to say, as men are growing into larger conceptions of what is implied in Him and in the new impulses He has introduced into human life, they are coming to see the absurdity of supposing that any one denominational organization can contain Him, or be an adequate expression of His mind. He is more

than ever clearly seen to be the counterpart of Him who "dwelleth not in temples made with hands."

A "belief in the Holy Catholic Church" in the sense indicated above should react on our religious life in several beneficial ways.

(1) It should give us a lively sense of gratitude to our predecessors in the Christian faith and a sense of the unbroken continuity of the Christian life in all ages. There is a tendency in Protestantism, arising out of the circumstances of its origin and out of its emphasis on the immediate contact of the Spirit of God with the individual soul, to be partial and inadequate in its sense of the continuity of the Church, and in its gratitude to God for His patient maintenance in *every* age of witness to Himself. This defect has probably been one of the causes of the "dissensus" of Protestantism, of its aptness to degenerate into provincialism and to develop the factious and divisive spirit. We need as a corrective to this to remember how continuous has been the spiritual life in the Church,

and how a long-suffering God has borne with the faults and superstitions which in every age have adhered to its organization. The more vivid and the farther-reaching is our impression of the patience of the wooing Spirit of God, the deeper will be our personal sense of obligation, the more truly "evangelical" our spirit. For it is just the sense of infinite debt to the Supreme, "the habit of grace," it is just this that is the dominant note in the Christian life everywhere: the universal Church of Jesus is one vast Brotherhood of Infinite Obligation.

(2) The thought of the vastness, variety, duration, and essential unity of the common life to which we belong if we be members of Christ's Body, the Church, should impose upon us a sense of responsibility as having our place in the inheriting and transmission of that common life. We come into the Christian life not as though we were the first that ever burst into the sea of Christian truth and feeling, but as the successors, heirs and debtors of a vast company who represent the purest, sanest and most serviceable element

in the life of humanity. The "apostolic succession" is a tremendous reality for each Christian man, a pressure and a stimulus towards good of which he is robbed when "the apostolic succession" is by a fatuous and illiterate ecclesiasticism limited to one professional order. Every one of us who is baptized into the Spirit of Jesus is the successor of apostles, confessors, martyrs, monks, evangelists, reformers, who have mediated the Christian view-point and temper,—and, better still, of the great anonymous crowd of holy men who have lived and prayed, and live and pray now, in heaven, in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Who is the true Catholic? Is he the man who "belongs" to a privileged or highly institutionalized Church with ornate ritual and the traditions of great dignity in its services? Is he the stubborn conservative, timidly afraid to open the doors of salvation to any who do not enter by the way of some special "covenanted mercy"? No: "the true Catholic," as Dr. Alexander Whyte in an eloquent passage reminds us, is "the well-read, open-minded,

hospitable-hearted, spiritually-exercised Christian. He is of no sect and no school. He is of no occasion. He belongs to all sects, and all sects belong to him. So far as they have any portion of divine truth in their keeping, or any evidence of divine grace in their walk and conversation, they all are his fellow-communicants and his brethren. How rich such men are in truth and love and hope! For all things are theirs. All men, and all books, and all churches. Whether Paul, or John, or Augustine, or Athanasius, or Dante, or Behmen, or Luther, or Calvin, or Hooker, or Taylor, or Knox, or Rutherford, or Bunyan, or Butler, or Edwards, or Chalmers, or Newman, or Spurgeon.”¹

(3) The recollection of this great and ever-growing body of persons who have found the way to the solution of life's problems in Jesus Christ should react powerfully upon our confidence in Christ, and in the God whom through Him we trust. It will probably never be quite possible to deliver men from the craving after some authority in

¹ Whyte: “Newman: an Appreciation,” pp. 65, 66.

religion. Here is an authority which we may legitimately employ as a buttress of our personal faith, if that faith should suffer a temporary reverse. There rises up from this vast body of faith an exultant song of confidence in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: and the confidence has expressed itself not only in triumphant praise but in really effective service to mankind. Venturing upon God, this great host of toilers have made what is, after all, out of sight the greatest contribution to the solid progress of humanity: not in the realm of subjective feeling, therefore, but out in the field of objective historical fact, has their confidence been tested and justified.

We need not fear that this Church, the congregation of faithful men, will die out or fail of a holy succession. The outward forms of the church organizations *must* change, as they have changed in the past. Beginning as a special cult within Judaism, soon compelled to throw off its Jewish cloak, the church organization went forth to meet the world of Greek culture, only to find that

to accomplish its work of conquest it **must** change its language and its forms of thought. With the conquest of the Roman Empire came further changes in organization : and sweeping to the north and west, again the Church was compelled to adapt and alter her forms of thought, worship and service. The Institution, that is to say, was ever passing : the community of life endures.

To-day, there are many signs that many of the outward forms of our ecclesiastical institutions have served their term of usefulness, and must give way to new adjustments and arrangements. Wise men will not lift up violent and hasty axes against structures which have been treasure-houses of good : but if these crumble, they will not be too greatly dismayed. The husk passes : the kernel endures. "I will build My Church," said the resolute Christ, who knew Himself to be the "good shepherd," the true in-bringer of the final social order among men, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Note

I have not dwelt in a separate way upon the phrase "The Communion of Saints." The original meaning of that phrase is lost in obscurity. It is sometimes taken to refer to the possibility of holding real and reciprocally active fellowship with the blessed dead, and may have been originally intended specially to comfort the bereaved by persecution. Or, it has been thought to refer to the joint ownership by the various parts of the Church in the great treasure of the holy lives of the saints, a thought beautiful in itself though obviously opening the way to the doctrine of the transferred surplusage of merit. Probably to ourselves it means little more than the thought that one life throbs in every part of the Church universal, both the part that struggles on earth and the part that rests and triumphs in heaven. And that thought is really already covered by the interpretation I have given of the phrase "The Holy Catholic Church," and involved in its devotional use.

LECTURE VII
THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

• • • The forgiveness of sins

LECTURE VII

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

MANY men now in early middle age can recall the time when "the forgiveness of sins" was the central subject of preaching, and was apparently regarded as the inmost core of religion. To-day, the phrase "forgiveness of sins" has about it for many an air of remoteness from the actualities of daily life, as a bit of ecclesiastical verbiage. To be sure, the twentieth century man knows well enough that there is evil in the world, and would not deny that there are unlovely traits and possibilities in himself,—he is no better, he will tell you, than he should be: but his "sins" and their alleged extra-mundane issues he is "not bothering about"; and forgiveness he dismisses as a conception which is childishly out of touch with facts as they are, and he

regards it as a conscience-drugging projection into imaginary objectivity of a perfectly familiar and perfectly explainable subjective experience of exhaustion and recoil.

Now undoubtedly, if this situation is to be regretted, the blame must in part be laid to the fact that for various reasons the matter of the adjustment of the individual soul to God has passed from the foreground of the mind of many leaders of Christian thought,—in favour, for the most part, of the matter of the adjustment of our relations to our fellow men: and that, as a consequence, the Christian doctrine of the forgiveness of sin has not been worked upon, and has been suffered to stand for ideas which it was never meant to represent, and which are totally at variance with the facts of life.

It would be well, therefore, that we should endeavour carefully to reëxamine the too familiar phrase: it may be that we shall see that it covers a message which we need, which we can find nowhere but in the religion of Christ, and which is a tremendous

fortification of our confidence in the God whom Christ invited us to trust.

Now when a religious idea like the idea of the "forgiveness of sins" becomes so familiar that it glides in and out of our mind without being challenged by the faculty which calls a halt upon *new* ideas, the only way by which we can grasp its meaning is by endeavouring to divest ourselves of every authority and every presumption in its favour, and confronting life, without an authoritative book, ask ourselves whether the idea is real or credible.

Suppose then that, closing our Bibles, we ask, Is forgiveness of sin credible? Let us first interrogate nature. It is notorious that "Nature knows no forgiveness": if a child puts its hand into the fire, the hand will be burned: if it puts its hand a second time it will be burned again if and as long as there is any hand left to burn. And harsh as is this conduct of "our unthinking Mother," it is upon the whole well that she is harsh: if the violation of nature's laws were not visited with strict punishment, we could not become

so easily acquainted with the laws which we must obey in order to control nature.

Let us turn next to organized society : does Society forgive? The representatives and administrators of law in organized society will tell you that while here and there in the case of a first offender Society may show a little clemency, it is upon the whole utterly impossible for Society to exist on the basis of forgiveness. Society must take measures to visit with punishment the violation of her laws. Let us, then, address ourselves to individual men. In the relations between individual persons is forgiveness possible? The answer depends on what you mean by forgiveness, and on the quality of the wrong done. If a man treads upon my toe, and apologizes for hurting me when as a matter of fact the injury has been extremely trifling, it is easy for me to condone the wrong : to say "Don't mention it," and to *mean* my "forgiveness." But if that man insults and wrongs my daughter, can I forgive him? Can I be my daughter's father and treat that man as though he had done no wrong?

Let us come nearer still, and question one individual life without any but indirect reference to others. Is there not between my sin and its consequences a chain which I cannot break? My life since my childhood has become more and more entangled in the lives of others. The sins I have committed have assuredly told upon the fabric of life by which I am surrounded. To undo the sin, that fabric would have to be taken apart, cleansed and reconstructed. Is this possible, is it even thinkable?

Come closer still. If this is the way the law of the entanglement of human lives works, can a man forgive himself? Now the trouble is that if I be morally flabby, superficial and inadequate in my appreciation of what Evil means, I can easily wipe my lips after quaffing the wine of iniquity, and proceed to sin again. But if I have any sensitiveness to clean living, any moral integrity, can I easily forgive myself? Nay rather with the sharpening of my sense of the wrong done, does not the idea of forgiving myself become increasingly repellent? And if an

honourable man thus finds difficulty in forgiving himself *can an honourable God forgive?* A God so weak that He dreaded to face the disagreeables of discipline we cannot conceive. A God who condoned sin we could not trust. A God who ordained laws only to suspend or break them at the sound of one remorseful whine we could not away with.

Where then do we stand in this matter of the forgiveness of sin? Outside the Bible and its message, it would seem as though all were unbroken darkness. One must of course be perfectly fair and try not to exaggerate the darkness. Let us go back then for a moment upon our survey. First, as to nature. I said that nature knows no forgiveness. There is a certain inaccuracy there, for there is in nature a patient renewal of gifts which involves something very like forgiveness. I have stood upon Stirling Rock in Scotland and seen the golden wheat waving in the wind upon near a dozen battle-fields where men had shed each the other's blood. Such patient return by nature of

golden good for iron wrong looks very like forgiveness : it seems a sacrament of the renewal of moral opportunity.

Go back to our questioning of Society. I said Society must visit with punishment the violation of her laws. But we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that Society is revising her ideas of punishment, in a direction which looks towards the restoration of the erring member to fitness for his place in the social organism.

I said it was hard (and it is certainly rare) for men to forgive one another serious wrong. Yes : but cases do occur, where the forgiveness is no cheap condonation, but where the offended one patiently and persistently takes home the offense to his own heart and life, bearing the suffering which the offender should have suffered and opening his heart to the offender so magnanimously that the heart of the wrong-doer is broken, and the way is opened for a relationship warmer, tenderer than existed before the wrong was done. Rare this is, I admit, but where it does exist, it bears in upon one irresistibly the sugges-

tion that if large-hearted and self-sacrificing pity like this exists among men there cannot be less than this in God.

Once more come back to the individual life, entangled as it is. When I do wrong, something or some one within me authoritatively rebukes me. But the rebuke is a protest, not a destroying blow. It is a pained and grieved remonstrance, not a swift retribution. What does this "inhibited force" on the part of my Rebuker mean if it does not mean a moral hope for me?

If then one is to be perfectly fair to the picture of forgiveness in life as one finds it outside one's Bible, one has to say that though there is a lowering cloud of darkness there are here and there faint rays of the light of hope. Further than that one cannot go.

Now let us turn to the Bible. Here first one observes a peculiar and unique view of sin. "Sin" is, strictly speaking, an exclusively Biblical idea. "Vice" describes moral evil in its relation to our idea of purity: "crime" the idea of moral evil in its relation to law: but sin is moral evil considered in

connection with God.¹ This is the Bible's view of sin: a view nowhere else so emphasized. And as the relation in which moral evil is regarded in the Bible is unique, so also is the content of moral evil. "Sin" indeed is not an incident, nor a series of incidents, whether of transgressions, or derelictions, whether basenesses of the body or of the disposition. "Sin" in the Bible is a state of the soul, a condition or attitude to God, and so to men: a state and attitude which are not, so to say, passive but active forces of destruction.

The Bible then does not minimize sin, and if it teaches that sin is forgiven, we are warned at once that no airy and costless condonation is meant. One of the earliest Biblical characterizations of God reads thus: ² "The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty."

¹ A. Fairbairn, "Christ in Modern Theology," p. 452.

² Exodus xxxiv. 5, 6.

That last clause seems like the flattest of contradictions of what went before. It is evident that the Bible regards forgiveness as something which is compatible with honour, with rigid and inexorable regard for the interests of righteousness and truth. This is puzzling : but at least it commands our respect and attention : it is not something which, as in the case of condonation, we know is unjust, untrue, and unworthy of God. It *is* puzzling : "Thus wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their doings" :¹ what does it mean ? We cannot keep back the question, "How can God be at once just and yet the forgiver of the ungodly ?" This is precisely the question which the Old Testament does itself raise. It does not answer the question. The sacrificial system of which we read so much states but does not solve the problem : the prophets protested against the inadequacy of sacrifice as a solution, without being themselves perfectly explicit as to what the solution should be. The problem is as a matter of fact handed over to

¹ Psalm xcix. 8.

the New Testament, where it is solved not in propositional but in personal form.

For the moment we begin to make acquaintance with Jesus Christ we find ourselves in an arresting atmosphere in this matter of forgiveness, and the resolving of the difficulty begins to draw into sight.

Jesus is Himself frankly a believer in the forgiveness of sin; but His announcements of forgiveness are made so as to suggest the difficulty and cost of forgiveness.

Early in His ministry while He was speaking in a crowded room, a man was with difficulty thrust before Him who suffered from a terrible disease. Jesus' enemies were glad of the interruption for they said, "Here is a specially difficult case: we shall test this young healer." Jesus says to the afflicted man: "Lad, be of good cheer: thy sins are forgiven thee." "Ah!" said the enemies of Jesus: "we thought so. He cannot heal this man's bodily trouble, so He gives him a cheap and easy word of cheer." Jesus became aware of what was passing in their minds, and He said: "Do you think, then,

that it is easy to forgive a man his sins?" *Easy to forgive!* It almost seems as if our Lord for the moment had difficulty in getting at that astonishing point of view. Then He said, "If you suppose, for example, that it is easier to say 'Thy sins are forgiven,' than to help this man out of his disease——" He turned to the sick man and said—"Will you take up your bed and go out of the room?" The man lifted his little mattress and rolled it up and walked out in health and strength.

And there apparently the incident closed: but we who read are left with that sad astonished query of Jesus ringing in our ears: "*Easy to forgive sin?*" Jesus does not explain, but He evidently feels and knows the difficulty of forgiving sin. He does not say what that is in God which enables Him to forgive while maintaining His honour, nor what that is in Himself which makes Him the authoritative medium of the Divine forgiveness.

For there were things which only deeds, not words, could explain. A few hours before He died, Jesus is reported to have said

“I have declared Thy name” . . . and then with a sighing anticipation of the Cross He adds “and will declare it.” He knew there was something in God which the Cross would enable Him to show forth as words never could.

And so it happened. At first the Cross but dazed the disciples. Then on Pentecost the light flashed suddenly upon the praying Church, and the secret of Jesus—that which His life and death had both been designed to tell—became the possession of the apostolic circle.

What is the secret? What is that “mystery” which the Church at first could find no words in any single language to unfold, and which throughout the ages she has been endeavouring to render explicit and articulate? I have no language beautiful enough to tell it: I can put it only into dull, bare prose. The secret is that FORGIVENESS MEANS SELF-SUBSTITUTION, and that that in God which enables Him to forgive, and not merely ignore, transgression, is that He takes the sinner’s place. Let us try to realize

this truth, and stand for a moment in holy awe before it. God has always put Himself in the place of man : this is His very nature ; and is no accident nor incident of time merely, neither is it the outcome of our appeasing prayers : the fact is seen not alone in Calvary or in the life of Jesus, but (if we have eyes to see) in the lives of all good men, and in the fabric of nature itself. There *is* forgiveness with God that men may fear Him, may stand in astonished awe before a God so self-sacrificing and so insatiably hospitable and loving in heart.

This is the mystery hid from the early ages, but now made plain in Jesus Christ our Lord : whose Spirit, in the very exercise of the self-substituting ministry that saves, keeps urging men and women everywhere so to carry the burden of the world's sin as to help to its removal. In the exercise of that ministry, men and women suffer—God knows they suffer!—vicariously the torture that is sin's shadow even while yet the sinner, in the brief interval of roystering before the shadow reaches him, riots in hilarity: but

the suffering tells. It leads to the patient and careful tracking of the consequences of sin, to the study of the safest means to arrest its baneful course: it leads to tracing backward to the headwaters of desire, the beginnings of sin, and to earnest and prayerful effort for the cleansing of the powers of the will at their source and spring. And thus it works and works—the spirit of vicarious ministry—with God Himself, the God revealed in the Lamb, alertly active at its heart,—and it will increase in volume till sin has been destroyed.

Here then is something which is a world away from cheap and immoral condonings of iniquity, or from the ignoring of law, and the “chain of fate.” It is the mystery of a God of love, always in, with and under the world He has made, through patient suggestion of beauty and of holiness, and through no less patient discipline and pruning, making His world a world of free persons responsive to Himself. What it costs this Heart of Love through all the tragedy of human wrong and sinning to adhere to its Resolve,

“I have made and I will bear”: that has but once in history found adequate (though even then inarticulate) expression—when Jesus hung dead on Calvary. But the sign of the Son of Man is in the heaven: His sufferings are “filled up” in the suffering of His Spirit in all who share it still: the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world is wounded still, nor will the wound be staunched till the foundations are laid of a sinless world to come.

What is the condition of obtaining forgiveness like this? The condition is that we be willing to enter into this self-substitution of God, and confess our sin. What does confession mean? It means first of all, subscription to the Divine judgment on sin: saying “Amen” to the Divine verdict. That means not only turning with loathing from the sin, but placing ourselves unreservedly into the hands of God, for such disciplinary handling as seems right in His sight. It is *self-entrustment to a God we trust*. And that, in turn, means more than delivering our-

selves over to our Judge humbly to carry out whatever be His demands in the way of exposure, apology, restitution, renunciation. It means placing ourselves in God's hands not only for chastisement, but for the refining of His friendship, that He may "make us over" in His own spirit and disposition. No man can be "forgiven" whose self-surrender to God is simply an affair of surrender to a Heavenly Police. But to him who is made willing to be so handled and moulded by the Heavenly Friend that new dispositions in him take the place of the old, to that man is forgiveness made real. And this is why our Lord said: "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive you": for the forgiven man is marked by the production in him of the forgiving temper, the result of the absolute abandon with which he has placed himself in the hands of a forgiving God. He who secures forgiveness is he who says, "God, for Thy Love's sake, make me over from the heart outward, let Thy Spirit reign in me *at any cost whatever*: only let me be

like Thee and abide in Thy cleansing friendship."

And what will be the results of such entrustment? Such humble friendship with a cleansing God must issue in the formation in me of new habits, tastes, interests, which all are barriers against the return of sin's attack. And in the joy of this new life my spirit will renew its freshness and its zest in life. Yet from time to time cold winds out of my past will blow across my spirit. The sin I cannot wholly forget will loom up more hideous and shameful the more I know of the friendship of God, and the nearer I draw to His white holiness. The consequences of the sin, in part, may abide upon my body, and in the physical fabric of my life. I may feel these consequences in the form of disabilities in Christian service which I dare explain to no man, but which keep me apart from certain opportunities which it may be open to others readily to seize. My joy will thus be not hilarity but a subdued and serious comfort: the quiet of a wounded but solaced sufferer: the inexpressible gratitude of a

penitent, received to his astonishment into the very family of God.

To some, accustomed to the boisterous hilarities of a thoughtless evangelism, this may seem too sombre a note on which to preach the Gospel of forgiveness. But what I have written is true to the experience of the thoughtful penitent. It is not, let one hasten to add, the *whole* of the Remission Gospel. In the Apostles' Creed, the "forgiveness of sins" is followed by "the resurrection of the body." It is a sequence in which it may be we have seen no significance. Yet it is in the hope of the resurrection of the body,—of the complete reorganization hereafter, in a fashion impossible here, of our individual and corporate lives; it is in this glorious hope that the Evangel of forgiveness is complete. Here there abide and must abide upon our experience the scars of sin—I have seen an aged saint who fifty years had served his redeeming Lord, yet bear upon his face the scars of the sins of a dissolute youth, and in his body the aches

that were the Nemesis of his days of riot, even while his face shone with a reflection of the glory of God. Yes: the scars in part remain while we are here. But yonder, when we have passed through the changes Death alone can work, we shall be free. We shall be like *Him*—like Christ upon whose brow no shame of personal sin had ever set its furrow. In that day we, the infants of God now, shall be His full grown sons: the very memory of sin will disappear, the very colour of sacrifice be washed from our robes,¹ and life will experience its last release from the evil that so long had thwarted the love of God.

It is because our God in Jesus Christ has revealed Himself as our Burden Bearer, our Redeemer, our Ultimate Emancipator, that He is to us “the God we trust.”

¹ Rev. vii. 14.

LECTURE VIII
OUR PROSPECT IN GOD

The resurrection of the body and
the life everlasting

LECTURE VIII

OUR PROSPECT IN GOD

IN our last study we have been reminded how difficult it is for us moderns,—whose eyes have been opened to see that in this natural order consequences follow upon deeds and thoughts with terrible inevitableness and bite their way into the fabric of reality,—how difficult it is for us to believe in the forgiveness of sin: and how impossible it is for us to believe that its results include, within this order, a completed process of repair.

But the Creed in its final clauses triumphantly posits another Order, in which there shall not be one lost good, and the lives of the redeemed shall emerge into fullness of beauty, and power, and opportunity.

What are we to make of this offered prospect? The modern man is suspicious of "otherworldliness" in general, and, in par-

ticular, of efforts to escape from the pressure of present problems by the airy promise of a supramundane order where these problems cannot intrude.

And yet—and yet, he fain would know what he may believe about the life eternal. To be sure, he is very busy, and the matter cannot receive his sustained attention: but in the fabric of his occupations there are interstices of leisure, or of sudden weakness, or of bitter resentment against life's tortuous or monotonous ways, or again of trembling hope: and into these interstices shoots quick the question, "If a man die shall he live again?" Besides, life is becoming shorter: perceptibly shorter, since pain has begun to be mastered by medical science, since the laws of health have become so much better known, since therefore so much more activity is possible within the years, since so many more contacts with life's interests have been made possible. Life, I say, has become *shorter*: opportunity more obviously and tantalizingly lacking to carry through to the end any one of the many pursuits, studies,

enterprises which offer themselves to us as the swift, kaleidoscopic days rush past. All this makes men cry out for a Life of ampler opportunity, of unhurrying action, of satisfying quality and content.

We are glad to hear the scientists one after the other tell us that they believe in the immortality of the soul. We pay special deference to their dicta upon life,—for very many of us the physical scientist has quite supplanted the ecclesiastical person as authority on the meaning of life. And we understand the scientist to say that he has not found it possible to equate the forces of Death and Life, and that he cannot see that Death can destroy the sum total of that which our persons seem to him to be. We are glad and relieved, but somehow the message leaves us cold. For mere survival after death is too colourless, or else has too many ominous possibilities in it, to interest us. “Continuous existence” is a phrase lying too near the precise tragedy of our modern monotonously-restless civilization, to awaken any enthusiasm in us. What we

are really concerned to know is *what kind* of life is it that lies beyond?

Now the first fact which we must try to grasp in connection with the Christian message is that its key-note is not the Immortality of the soul, but *Resurrection*.

The immortality of the soul is not a prominent Christian interest. The Christian religion deals with the future of the only self we know: which is both soul and body. In place of the thin dogma of the survival by the spirit of the disturbance of physical dissolution, it teaches the much more difficult doctrine of the emergence of all that which makes us truly ourselves, not only unimpaired by death, but transfigured and enriched in faculty and opportunity.

I have said the key-note of this message is Resurrection: and of Resurrection, Jesus Christ is Norm.

Now the Scriptural representation of the Risen Christ possesses some features which we ought clearly to see.

To begin with, Christ is represented as

having, through death, emerged into a type of life which while it was human was more and other than any type of life until then seen upon the earth.¹ Christ was, according to the story, manifestly the same person, with the same interests, affections, friendships: but He is represented as changed. He is not merely a survivor of a cruel torture: He has come out upon a higher plane of being. He is seen only as He wills, and when He wills He vanishes from sight. His body is the absolute servant of His spirit and depends for its service to Him solely on the will of His spirit. Yet,—and this is the important and little-realized point—the Risen Christ is no phantom, nor is His life less “substantial” than ours. He eats with His disciples of bread and broiled fish; He has Himself prepared the fire on which these things were cooked.²

¹ Cf. p. 100.

² I do not discuss here the credibility of the story in its detail: I am concerned simply to recall the Scriptural representation. But the question of the credibility of the narratives, especially of the fourth gospel, cannot finally be determined apart from an appreciation of the significance of the representation as a whole.

Now all this amounts to a new and unheard-of *kind* of life. It is the diametrical opposite of the imaginings of the ancient classical literature, Greek or Hebrew, about the other world. To that literature, what remained after the havoc of death was a diaphanous and intangible ghost that wandered about an insubstantial world. In the "Unseen World" of Virgil nothing seems real except the tortures: the good men, the heroes, are tantalized by their own vaporous and ineffective existence.

Now this is the first syllable in the Christian message about the life to come: that the Life eternal is not less but more *substantial* and satisfying and varied than this. Such words as "substantial," though they smell of the stuff of the earth, we must use, because we have so few words that express the condition of satisfying achievement, except words which, like "tangible," "solid," "substantial," come to us from the earth, our contact with which so much contributes to our sense of reality. But the point is that the other life is fuller, richer, more rubicund, of deeper content,

than the life here. I have hinted above that this is little grasped. It is amazing how, in spite of the plain words of Scripture, pagan conceptions of the future survive to haunt us, and we are still exposed to the horror of the anticipation of being unclothed spirits, living out a thin and pallid, even if it be "religious," remainder of life, all that is truly solid and satisfying being left behind us here.

Now this quality of the life beyond, the life that is Life indeed, the Christian documents labour to make clear to us by what is called the "Resurrection of the body."

It should at once be admitted that this phrase is fitted, *prima facie*, to obstruct the path of the modern man by many difficulties. Of course if by the resurrection of the body is meant the "recollection and reintegration of these same fleshly bodies of ours, when the material particles have long been scattered and have become parts of the bodies of animals and other men,"—the modern man can have only one response to make: This thing is incredible. The man who can believe that, can believe anything: and the Omnipotent

tence that can bring this thing about is an Omnipotence exercised at the cost of the respect of intelligent men. A man who believes this kind of thing "must not," said Dr. John Watson, "say that Reason in this matter has called in the resources of faith and that they work together in loyal companionship,—for in this case Reason has been dethroned and silenced, lifting up her voice all the time and protesting against the insult."

And if, as the Latin form of the phrase in the Creed—" *resurrectio carnis* "—suggests, the framers of the Creed desired to express their belief in this colossal absurdity, we can only say, "So much the worse for those who thus misunderstood the Holy Scripture." If they really thus misunderstood, there were not wanting protests against the position. "Neither we," says Origen, "nor the sacred Scriptures assert that those who are dead shall live again in their flesh as it was, without having undergone any change for the better."

What then is the essential Christian belief behind the phrase the resurrection of the

body? It is that to every redeemed soul set free by death God gives a body as it hath pleased Him, a body suited to the new environment upon which the emancipated spirit enters. This new body will be the fitting expression of a personality persisting from this present unto that other sphere, yet transfigured and glorified: the body will therefore itself be "in glory" and perfectly equipped. The spirit will be its master, not its thrall: the will of the redeemed person controlling the body's movement so that it may adequately express that will.

We know nothing of the relation between that body that shall be, and what we call our body now. "We are not these changing bodies which we bear." If our "flesh" is constantly changing, nay constantly dying and being replaced, what is the "body" which yet through all the changes we see to be the abiding envelope and expression of our spirit? Is there between that "body" that is within our changing flesh, and "the body that shall be" some mysterious link such as that which connects the acorn with

the oak, the seed with the golden wheat? We cannot tell. All that we do know is that there is a natural body: and there is a spiritual body, for we shall not be "unclothed but clothed upon": and that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.

What then we are by the phrase "resurrection of the body" encouraged to believe is not some unverifiable speculation about the relations of nature and spirit; but the satisfying assurance that this life here is to the Life to come as *shadow is to substance*, as *image to reality*. We have not yet more than begun to live: there may be a thousand modes of human existence; who can tell? Christ said He came to give us life abundant, and not a heaven remote from our experience and offering us only a religious remainder of existence. Surely there are interests in life here, joyful, lawful, life-enriching, interests from which we have been barred by the limitations of our earthly lot,—which we may hope one day to pursue: the Christian message assures us that this is true,—that Life as we draw nearer

God will grow in variety and fullness, will be ever deepened in content.

It is true that we cannot imagine in detail the occupations of the life to come. The reticence of the Bible here contrasts most instructively with the garrulousness of irresponsible speculation. And it contrasts no less noticeably with the wide-spread misunderstanding of its teaching. "The Christian ideal," says a distinguished sociologist of our time, "is Leisure in a future world to play harps and sing songs." It is difficult to be patient with this illiterate travesty of our hope, begotten as it is of taking with banal literalness some exquisite figures of speech in early Christian poetry. It is an insult to the Christian intelligence to suppose that it looks forward to an existence spent in meaninglessly serenading a God who has an insatiable thirst for applause. If the New Testament speaks of praise and rest in heaven, our common sense should be equal to the task of understanding that what is described is the condition of thankful joy and of quietude and contentment of mind in which in a harmonious

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social order each man will live his life and perform his share of the work of the whole.

What the Bible does assure us of is that the knowledge of God begun here will be deepened and perfected, and worship set free from its embarrassments and limitations: that both the capacity and opportunity for fellowship with others will be greatly widened, so that no man will feel that he is missing any chance of drawing out of the resources of the vast fellowship around him: and that every life will have its fitting opportunity at once for self-development and for useful service to God and to His Universe.

Thus the assurance of Scripture is that precisely the elements of life here which are most precious and most promiscuous are those which will abide, only in infinitely amplified opportunity and content. We shall not be amputated, nor our real selves imperilled, by the savage onslaught of Death: nay, out of it we shall rise into the true possession of ourselves¹ and of one another, and of God; so verily,

¹ Heb x. 34: Knowing that ye have your own selves for a better and an abiding possession.

shall we be more than conquerors, through Him who loved us.

Thus does this venerable Symbol, which at the outset encouraged us to trust in God, encourage us in that confidence to the very end, where it leads us to the feet of God, crowned with the honour of life in Him.

It is not a Creed for hilarious hours, but for hours of deep and real need. To the light-hearted youth intoxicated by the joy of life, to the student untried by sorrow, to the man of contracted vision whose gaze is upon life's immediate incidents rather than upon its ultimate meaning, much of it may seem remote and otiose: its note is rather of strong comfort in the face of life's tragedy than of a rousing summons to action, forgetting life's tragedy or ignoring it.

It begins in God and in His Fatherhood, and soon unfolds the sacrificial quality of that Fatherhood by its solemn, unadorned narration of that in history to which God's

Fatherhood compelled Him. And lo! we learn that in Jesus Christ our God has belted with His love the outmost circle of our life, plumbed its deepest seas of tragedy, and countersigned and intensified its holiest, loftiest hopes.

It is upon an enswathing Love like this and on such a Love alone, that we can lean in the conscious nakedness of our need as sinful men: and it is in the act of self-entrustment to a God like this, that lies the only secret and beginning of a strong, self-discovering, self-developing, death-defeating life.

Note on Some Omissions from the Apostles' Creed

SOME of the omissions of the Creed are so startling that it is difficult at first sight to see how without the missing items any symbol, doctrinal, polemical, devotional, or missionary, could have passed muster as an account of the Christian faith.

There is, to begin with, no reference to Holy Scripture or to its authority. Whatever dangers may lie in the devotional use of the Creed, Bibliolatry is not one of them. The picture which the "I" of the Creed brings before us is of a Christian man who is counting his present possessions, and recommitting himself into the hands of a present God. The references, brief as they are, to the historic career of Jesus suggest that to those who used the Creed the records of that career, and any literature that would throw light upon those records, would be precious: but one feels instinctively that any reference to the authority of a book would be an irrelevance to the religious attitude which

the "I believe" assumes. And from this, thoughtful persons will draw their own conclusions as to the properly subordinate place which the authority of a Book should occupy in the mind of the worshipping Christian.

There is no reference to the discipline of the individual religious life. The Apostles' Creed shares with the Fourth Gospel the astonishing characteristic of omitting all reference to the Lord's Supper. If we take the Creed therefore as even approximating to a true standard of emphasis, the Lord's Supper, however valuable as seal and reinforcement of religious life, cannot rightly occupy a central place in our view of the Christian faith. A similar omission is that of any reference to Baptism (either our Lord's or ours), and even to prayer. Is not the reason for these omissions to be found in the meaning of "I believe in" which is assumed in this book? Acts of self-committal are directed properly towards God, not towards instruments of religious discipline, in the efficacy of which, apart from the surrender to God of the participant, men are ever prone to trust.

Repentance, conversion, communal worship, the Lord's Day, these all are passed over in a silence which has its own wealth of suggestion.

I have in the text of this book referred to the surprising omissions of any detail respecting our Lord's teaching and works of power here on earth, and to the fact that the Creed leaps from the thought of His birth as a helpless infant to the thought of His suffering as a helpless victim: perhaps that this double weakness might contrast with the power of His resurrection, ascension and enduement with sovereignty and authority to judge. Christian people will ponder over this emphasis, so Pauline in its contrasts, *so contrary to the prevailing emphasis of our time.*

But most of all does one wonder that nothing is said of the kingdom of God, or of our social obligations and responsibilities: not a word of our duty to our equals or to those beneath us in privilege and opportunity: not a word of the brotherhood of man, except what seems the pallid and narrow substitute of the communion of saints. Yet on second thought there begin to ap-

pear considerations which reconcile us to these omissions: *e. g.*, the consideration that after all the first and main thing is a man's relation to God, and that it is only by violence against the whole conception of God which the Creed outlines, and against the attitude to Him which the Creed illustrates, that a man can escape the obligation of reverent interest in all that concerns the uplift of his fellows. For the thought of God that is central to the Creed carries with it regard for *His* thought as to what man is meant to be, and may, and must become.

But with all these omissions it is surely too severe a judgment to say that the Creed fails to reproduce the original Christian Gospel in its true proportions. The "original Christian Gospel" surely had at its heart that which is at the heart of true religion everywhere, what was at the heart of Abraham's religion no less than Paul's, *viz.*, self-entrustment to God. If we are compelled to say that it is not the self-entrustment which the Creed expresses but a statement of dogmatic

opinions, then indeed does it fail to represent the "original Christian Gospel." But as we have seen, not only is the interpretation that the Creed expresses an act of self-committal, admissible linguistically, but no other interpretation really could explain the adoption, wide-spread and continuous, of the recitation of the Creed as an act of worship.

Theological moulds of doctrine come and go: the generations change their views of Holy Scripture: the devices for the discipline of the individual religious life do not remain fixed but change with changing conditions: the social emphasis must ever be there yet its pressure will wax and wane. But what *must* abide, else religion will at once die out, is the placing of the hand in the hand of God, the making of a holy covenant, the pledging of oneself in gratitude, self-abasement, and holy hope, to serve towards the fulfillment of His holy designs for oneself and for the world. It is this to which the Creed ever urges us: to a renewal of self-devotion to THE GOD WE TRUST.

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